NEW YORK CRITICS REVIEW MARIA CALLAS AND RENATA TEBALDI:
A Study in Critical Approaches to the
Inter-relationship of Singing and Acting in Opera

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ABSTRACT

The following study is an analysis of New York reviews of performances of Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi which attempts to discover what opera critics feel to be the most effective artistic balance between singing and acting in opera. Callas and Tebaldi have been chosen as the subjects of the reviews because of their renown as singers, the closely coinciding circumstances of their careers and the polarities which they represented in the issue of acting versus singing in operatic performance.

The primary data of the study (largely opera, concert and recording reviews) has been taken from distinguished American journals, such as Saturday Review, The New Yorker, Musical America and The New York Times. Secondary information has been extracted from "news" journals, such as Time and Newsweek; and books, most of which were written by critics who figure prominently in the main body of the analysis. The information (consisting of news stories, personal interviews with the singers, and discussions of critical obligations) has been included in order to gain a broader perspective on the critics, the singers and the concept of acting in opera.

The general conclusion reached in this study is that though most critics demand much musical and little dramatic finesse in operatic performance, they are capable of profound appreciation of a singer's histrionic talent and will overlook many vocal flaws when it is manifest.
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine a selection of critical reviews of New York operatic performances by Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi in order to determine the critics' varying attitudes toward the balance and inter-relationship between an operatic performer's singing and acting abilities. The focus of the study is serious popular criticism as distinct from the layman's response of the "news" report, the more esoteric examinations of learned journals, and the hindsight of books. It is felt that the articles gathered here form, in view of the seriousness of their purpose, the considerable range of their public appeal and the immediacy of their relationship to the operatic event, an accurate indication of contemporary attitudes toward the importance of acting in opera.

The secondary aim of this paper is to review the American careers of Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi. As almost exact contemporaries, their careers demonstrate striking parallels, yet their considerable artistic laurels and enthusiastic popular acclaim were derived from very different, if not entirely opposite combinations of talents and priorities. These divas were considered personal as well as artistic rivals by many and this rivalry, real or imagined, sparked numerous interesting critical comparisons. The fame of Callas and Tebaldi dominated most of the operatic world during the decade between 1955 and 1965, and their careers have continued in varying degrees of activity until the present day. As a result of their renown, the volume of journalism devoted to these sopranos is immense.
In order to make the comparison between these two singers as efficient as possible, four groups of articles have been chosen which correspond to similar events in the careers of the women: their American debut performances; their respective debut seasons with the Metropolitan Opera Company; their individual interpretations of the Puccini heroine, Floria Tosca, who was prominent in both their careers; and, finally, a selection of recording and concert reviews, teaching techniques and personal interviews.

The materials for this analysis have been drawn primarily from popular American journals of high intellectual reputation, which are, nevertheless, readily available to the general public. The New York Times, Saturday Review, The New Yorker, and Nation are the most frequently quoted magazines in this category. Further selections have been taken from Musical America, High Fidelity, The American Record Guide and Opera News, all of which may be presumed to reach a more knowledgable and perhaps more professionally-oriented readership, but which are still accessible to the casual reader. Reviews from these two source groups constitute the primary data under examination.

Information gathered from the "news" journals such as Time, Life, and Newsweek should be regarded, with occasional exceptions, as secondary data. Generally, this information falls into one of the following categories: reported excerpts from foreign critiques, domestic reviews from outside New York City and facts concerning individual performers and performances. Such data is included to provide a wider perspective on the review undergoing examination. Passages from more substantial literary publications have been used as evidence of the scholarly endeavours of several critics. However, such material is also secondary
data and meant to represent the tools of analysis rather than its subject.

A special body of information has been included in Chapter I in order to shed light on the phenomenon of criticism. This information has been gathered from several sources and falls into three categories: broad analyses of the role of the music critic; discussions about critical obligations by several of the reviewers featured in the main body of this study; and evidence of many of the individual critics; specific biases toward Maria Callas or Renata Tebaldi as performers.

It is hoped that careful examination and analysis of the materials that have here been listed may to some degree further understanding of the complex phenomenon we call opera.
CHAPTER I - THE CRITICS

Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi are recognizable, if not familiar names even in 1977, fifteen years after the peak of their fame. As two of the most popular sopranos of the operatic stage in recent memory, they displayed differing talents and personalities. A rivalry was assumed to exist between them, and their personal lives, especially that of Callas, were avidly followed by press and public. At times the sensationalism of the popular press threatened to overshadow their considerable artistic achievement.

Their critics, on the other hand, are private and elusive creatures and none more so than the journalistic critics. With relatively rare exceptions they are faceless entities about whom the public knows little and cares less. Yet critics assume god-like authority over many well-known and well-respected artists, sitting in judgment on their creative efforts. Most of the time the public accepts the critics' opinions, as though they were fact, too often assuming without question their right to pronounce sentence.

Artists and Critics on Critics

Writing for the National Review, Robert Moses points an accusing finger at, "The urban sophisticates and their poll parrot, cocktail party imitators," who, he claims, "...Sneer at simplistic sentimentalism and gleefully quote the critics." He goes on to describe the ordeal faced by New York theatre artists and producers on opening night and of writers of all genres after lacerating criticism from "the dailies."

In all such doings involving the arts we must have the word of critics. Jove with his bolts of lightning licks his
Olympian chops and gives a young Hamlet a shock that will blow him right out of his buskins. Minerve with her serpents' tongue sharpens a venomous tooth and transfixes budding Ophelia with a spiteful jab. As to the theater, the playwrights and their angels chew their nails to the quick at Sardi's, tremble at The Lambs and nervously sop up martinis at The Players as they wait the midnight verdict of the critics. And I think of the writers who pray that the weeklies and monthlies will be kinder than the Times, The Post and Women's Wear Daily.

Frequently and understandably the artist howls, "Unfair!"; "Parasite," while nursing his wounds. The critic as a pain-inflicting parasite is also commented upon by American composer Ned Rorem in an article entitled "Performing Arts Critics Criticized." After praising the critical ability of composers Igor Stravinsky and Virgil Thomson, Rorem goes on to note that,"...it is no coincidence that, more than the others [critics previously mentioned in the article], in the realest sense they know what they are writing about. When true vitality is found criticism seems superfluous... Music criticism, sparkling on its own (forget about what's being criticized), turns dull and meaningless before what needs dissecting."2

The smarting artist is not the only skeptic. Critics themselves do not always approve of their colleagues' means. "The professional boxer goes in for modified murder, the professional critic for literary mayhem and thinly disguised sadism," writes critic Moses, in a scathing analysis of what he terms "the professional faultfinder." "Many lady critics scold like fishwives without the saving grace of Billingsgate, and the male contingent resembles the eunuchs in the seraglio, experts but not participants. Those who can, do. Those can't, sneer."3 In a similar vein Robert Evett, composer and critic, concedes that while a critic "must be free to express his own opinions, whether they are positive or not...this is a profession that attracts people to it who enjoy being nasty, and such people should not be given a public forum." Bemusedly and somewhat apologetically, he reminisces about his own apprenticeship. "When I was twenty years old,
I was a fine example of the young critic who was full of beans and thought that I was performing a public service by attacking it [a composition by Vaughn Williams]. Many critics are musicians who have dropped out of the profession, and though some of them are unusually good, others are poisonous. A complete ignoramus is preferable to a disappointed pianist who, having got no place himself, is determined to cut everybody else down to nothing."

Whatever the accusations of critics' incompetence and however much such accusations are justified, critics have become an inescapable fact of life and art. Readers want advice on how to spend their time and their dollars to best advantage, and publications need critics to provide this service. Artists who grow too close to their creations often find an outside perspective of interest. Therefore, to make the best "use" of criticism it would seem necessary that both reader and artist know as much as possible about the critic's credentials. However, information regarding a critic's qualifications as well as discussion of his critical approach is difficult to find. Publications containing musical criticism rarely bolster credibility by giving résumés of professional training or experience, and the critics themselves for reasons best known to themselves seldom volunteer such information.

Identifying the Critics

However, the reader who wishes to discover the credentials of many of the current magazine critics need only visit a reference library. **Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians** contains information concerning the following critics: Olin, Downes, Robert Evett, Evertt Helm, Paul Hume, Harold Rosenthal, Robert Sabin, Winthrop Sargeant, Harold C. Schonberg, Victor Seroff, Howard Taubman, Lester Trimble, and Herbert Weinstock all
of whose work will be examined in this paper. Who's Who in Music pro-
vides information on Roland Gellat, Robert Jacobson, Newell Jenkins,
William Fense Weaver, Thomas Heintz, Peter Heyworth, and Irving Kolodin.
Both guides provide information about the critic's musical education and
training, describe his musical and journalistic career and list all com-
positions or books he may have published. (See Appendix for complete
information.) Such information is useful and reassuring when attempting
to evaluate a critic's work; however, by the time a critic becomes pres-
tigious enough to be mentioned in either Baker's Dictionary or Who's Who
his credentials may have become self-evident to the regular reader. Further-
more, certain conclusions may also be reached about a critic's qualifications
through his failure to appear in any of these guides. For instance, one
might doubt the critical astuteness of a reviewer such as Ronald Eyer who
wrote regularly for Musical America over many years yet never merited an
entry in any work of musical reference. Unfortunately, neither reference
books nor logical surmise, can identify and, thereby, ascertain the merit
of the neophyte who has just written either a scathing or an ecstatic review
of a world-renowned artist.

Critical Self-Analysis

Besides being evidence of scholarly endeavour, books written by jour-
nalistic critics often provide information to the attitudes of these men
toward their responsibilities as reviewers. In his preface to The Con-

Continuity of Music, Irving Kolodin gives the following modest description of
his experience and, thus, suggests his own qualifications:

What follows is a statement of observations, correlations, and conclu-
sions based on a listening experience available to few at any time, and none prior to, say, 1935. This statement is put forth with no pride or vanity, but to identify an oppor-
tunity as well as to state an obligation.

Having had the privilege, during more than 30 years of
professional concern with the subject, of record-listening by day and attendance at public events by night, I estimate my investment therein to be something more than 40,000 hours.

Total flight time does not of necessity make the best pilot, nor does listening time alone assure responsible judgment. But insofar as either is unique, so are the observations, deliberations and conclusions thus made possible. They constitute a body of information beyond the acquisition of anyone denied the opportunity, and merit public circulation, if not agreement and support.

In addition, Kolodin provides in the preface to his book The Metropolitan Opera information about professionalism of fellow critic Herbert Weinstock.

"It [The Metropolitan Opera] would not, in any case, have been what it is without the continuing devoted interest of Herbert Weinstock, whose understanding of the subject fulfilled—again—an author's ideal of what an editor should be."  

On the other hand, Winthrop Sargeant's autobiography In Spite of Myself is only inferentially revealing of his critical stance. Although it serves primarily to disclose the not very astonishing fact that an influential critic may be human and fallible, the book also recounts Sargeant's intensive early musical training culminating in a brief career as a professional violinist. Further, Sargeant describes the efforts poured into his early reviews for The New Yorker:

Now, The New Yorker, as everyone knows, is a sophisticated magazine that demands a polished style. Much of what it prints is regarded as literature rather than journalism... I felt that The New Yorker demanded my best efforts...Now, looking back, I can see that my enormous reverence for the prestige of The New Yorker was somewhat naive. It is, after all just a magazine, though it is one of very high standards. But at the time, the honor of writing for it seemed overwhelming and this honour conferred upon me the attendant obligation of being the most skillful writer of music criticism in the world. As a matter of fact, the music criticism I wrote for The New Yorker was exceedingly good.

B. H. Haggin provides the most direct and satisfying answers to a probe of his critical activities although his precise qualifications other than lengthy service as music critic for the Nation are not disclosed. Each
of his books is prefaced by lengthy and energetic manifestos of his critical philosophy, which are especially interesting in view of his reputation as a "poison pen" critic. Answering the charge of being gratuitously venomous Haggin quotes Bernard Shaw:

There was the impresario's plea for criticism that was helpful, constructive, considerate of the fact that he was doing the utmost that existing circumstances allowed. 'That does not shake me,' answered Shaw, 'since I know that the critic who accepts existing circumstances loses from that moment all his dynamic quality...His real business is to find fault; to ask for more; to knock his head against stone walls, in the full assurance that three or four good heads will batter down any wall that stands across the world's path.'

Music Observed, a collection of Haggin's critical reviews, further illuminates his critical approach:

Long developed and reasoned judgement even when unfavorable, is not a prejudice; and though it is likely to be a strongly expressed conviction, a man whose strongly held convictions are long-developed and reasoned judgements cannot be called opinionated, and his strong expression of such judgements cannot be called dogmatic. Not only must he be granted the right to his reasoned judgements, but his function, his duty, his sole usefulness as a critic, if he is one, is to state them---to state, that is, the reasons with the judgements. For criticism is not the mere opinion that this piece of music or this performance is good and that one is bad; it is the reasons for the opinion, in which the critic applies to what he has heard the insights that constitute his value to his readers.

However, lest the reader take the critic's opinion as dogma Haggin is careful to note elsewhere that,

The critic uses his powers to animate those of his readers---but only to animate, not to dictate; what he says about a piece of music is true for the reader only if it is confirmed by the reader's own ears. And each critic writes for the group of people who have found his perceptions and evaluations sufficiently confirmed by their own experience.

Although it assumes an intelligent and knowledgable reader, the previous statement contains disheartening implications concerning the reality of the critical function. Needless to say, critical dictatorship is to be avoided but is criticism, therefore, relegated to mere reiteration and
sanctification by the press of some readers opinions? Too often the public accepts unquestioningly.

Periodicals as Sources

It has been previously pointed out that pertinent facts about the critics are rarely revealed in opera reviews. Nevertheless, either careful perusal on a regular basis of the magazines in which the reviews are found or systematic search through the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature will often uncover supplementary articles on the subject of music criticism. For instance, Ned Rorem's "Critics Criticized" in Performing Arts magazine presents an artist's opinion of several leading critics.

Some spokesmen, like the avant-garde Kostelanetz, on the one hand or the rock critic Richard Goldstein on the other, set up straw men so as to plug an issue; they are nevertheless, passionate specialists. Some, like Hentoff or Poirier, while shining brightly in their respective domains on politics and literature, are simply uninformed in matters musical, treating those matters precisely as literature and politics. Others describe those matters sociologically, peripherally as 'homosexual'—which is always absorbing. Still others, like Simon and Rich, describe them within a professional context and are a pleasure to read.

Another attitude as to the function of a critic is to be found in Robert Evett's article "The Critics and the Public." After discussing the duties, responsibilities and integrity required of a reviewer Evett sums up in the following manner:

What is under review is the whole show. Every aspect of a musical event is the legitimate concern of a reader. Whether a reviewer's duty is to his boss, or his readers, or his art, or his own conscience, I don't know, but it is not possible to write a balanced review without balancing all of the elements.

Since any kind of recourse, legal or otherwise, is bad form for someone unfairly mauled by the press, the critic must be his own disciplinarian. The point seems to be to say what he feels he must, and as little as possible that he will later regret.

Recalling a scandal concerning editorial harassment of a critic with unrealistically high standards Evett provides the following not altogether
flattering cameo of an up-and-coming critic:

The critic was George Gelles, who at twenty-seven, had spent most of his adult life in the Boston area and had written so extensively for other papers that his taste and cast of mind were matters of public record.... He was highly trained in musicology and given to writing well-informed, sophisticated, erudite reviews. He also adopted a school-marmish, nitpicking posture and often severely scolded the people that came under his inspection. 13

Such a description strongly implies what Evett feels a would-be critic should avoid.

A more positive discussion of a fellow critic appeared when Herbert Weinstock was given a comprehensive obituary by his colleague and sometime collaborator Irving Kolodin:

Herbert Weinstock's first contribution to Saturday Review's music coverage dates to early 1948 which is to say, but a few months after the inception of the "Recordings" section in Sept. 1947. He last appeared in September's Multi-Media issue, only a few weeks before his death of heart failure in a routine surgical procedure. In between there were rare issues in which Weinstock's name did not appear as author of a perceptive, informed comment on a recording, occasionally a concert or an opera, or a foreign happening dispatched during his summers abroad.

Weinstock's participation in the long run of musical material that appeared in S. R. since 1947 went beyond his own comments. He was responsible for bringing to attention the celebrated article by Teodoro Celli on Maria Callas that appeared in an issue of the late '50's, and he also translated it from the Italian. He was an invariable source of information on any knotty problem that might have presented itself in the wide range of material that accumulated during the '50's and '60's....

A productive, disciplined worker, Weinstock also devoted a portion of his time to serving as consulting editor for the publishing firm of Alfred A. Knopf, and, thus, had a creative part in the appearance over several decades of numerous invaluable additions to the literature of materis musica. One thinks of Frank Walker on Wolf and Verdi, of Patrick Smith's recent libretto book, Joseph Kerman's Beethoven Quartets, various Stravinsky-Craft collaborations, etc. Weinstock's work has done him proud and is his best monument. 14

Short of addressing letters of inquiry to either the critics themselves or their editors the previous quotations suggest the slim sources available to the interested reader: biographical reference books; books written by the
critics; and occasional magazine articles discussing musical criticism. As a result of this scarcity of information, the simplest and probably the most commonly adopted practice is for the concerned reader to put his trust in the hands of the publication, assuming that a reputable newspaper or magazine would hire only qualified critics.

The Journalistic Process

The various stages an article undergoes before reaching the printed page are often complex. Winthrop Sargeant's account of the manner in which an article in *Time* or *Life* is assembled is illuminating.

I had been hired by *Time Magazine* as a writer on music. To my great delight, it was discovered some time afterward that I knew too much about music to write about in with the "fresh approach" demanded by *Time*. They didn't need an expert there; they simply wanted a general writer.

The trick was, of course, to write about something you knew little or nothing about but could bone up on in a hurry—one of the basic techniques of journalism. *Time Magazine* was at the time, and no doubt still is, one of the most efficient machines for the production of news copy—written with a fair amount of depth—that has ever been created. In its offices, the subject of an article would be presented by the writer to the magazine editor at a preliminary conference, and either accepted or rejected. If accepted, the subject would be passed on to one of an army of competent and attractive "researchers"—most of them Vassar, Wellesley and Smith girls—who promptly set about digging up all the known facts about it, using as sources encyclopedias, specialized books, the incomparable *Time* morgue (or "library", as it was euphemistically called), the wire press services and the newspapers. If necessary, the researcher would interview personally anyone involved with the subject and write a complete report, with quotations. A couple of days later all her material would be placed on the writer's desk. He would then read through it, digest its most suitable items and write his piece. The piece would then go to the departmental editor, who would cut, rewrite, and polish it, and then send it out to the managing editor, who might make a few small changes before putting it in its final form. It would then go back to the researcher, who would check every word to be sure that every stated fact was correct. Once corrected it would go, with perhaps a cut or two, to the printer. It will be noticed that in this process, the responsibilities of the writer were minimal. All he had to do was string words together fairly acceptably. Whether they were true or not was not his concern. Truth, or fact, was solely the responsibility of the editors. This was a situation calculated to spoil good writers. But the machine,
grinding on week after week, was actually a fairly efficient school of journalism.  

As an example of the way in which the journalistic process can corrupt a critic's integrity this quotation needs no further comment. Although Sargeant's earlier remarks concerning his working methods for The New Yorker provide an encouraging contrast to this gloomy picture of journalistic corruption, on the whole, it is not surprising that the conscientious critic often finds his working environment defeating.

Not only are critics subject to editorial whims, but they also experience great difficulties with their publishers. In attempting to explain the process by which one becomes a music critic Robert Evett quotes Virgil Thomson's answer to the question, "What do you need to be a music critic?"

"Well," he said, "the first thing you need is a job." "And how," Evett continues, "is this done? Surely nobody answering that great grammar school question 'What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up' ever put down 'critic', let alone 'music critic.' And it is doubtful that anybody ever got a job as music critic by applying for it. This is one field in which they ask you."  

This statement would seem to suggest that the potential critic already possesses a considerable reputation. However, Evett continues with a disheartening description of what the circumstances can be even when one is reputable enough to be asked. He recalls an interview which he himself was given for a position with a metropolitan daily which "consisted mostly of bawling me out in advance for all the things I would do wrong, if I got the job....The paper used music coverage as a form of public relations, to build goodwill in the community....This editor didn't once ask me if I knew anything about music or had any right to write about it. Or, for that matter, whether I could write about anything. He wanted a Goodwillnik...." Evett cites the previously mentioned case of George
Gelles, who became the victim of his own high standards. Gelles was engaged as music critic by a Boston daily which gave "the impression of being addressed to the upward mobile white-working-class, and...the last place you would look for serious criticism," despite the fact that he was already a critic well-known in the Boston area. "What is perfectly possible is that whoever hired him did so without taking the precaution of reading some samples of his work and decided only when it was too late that the product was not quite what the Herald wanted," Evett reports. The newspaper subsequently tried to discharge Gelles who resisted their action. The ensuing legal battle became a test case of the rights of the individual critic in the face of editorial interference. Although Gelles won his case, the fact remains that the relationship between a critic and his publisher is still more often than not, a delicate one open to abuse.

However, Evett does emphasize the distinction between writing for city dailies, on the one hand, and magazines and "learned journals," on the other.

A critic writing for a learned journal normally works within his specialty, whatever that is. A critic who works for a magazine also enjoys a privileged status in that he can write about pretty much what he pleases. But the music critic of a metropolitan daily has a split-level job. He may find that, in the ordinary performance of his duties, he has to listen to music that is of no interest to him and to make judgements that are entirely beyond his competence. The music page lives off the land. Any event that is open to the public is subject to newspaper coverage.

The implications of Evett's discussion is clearly that magazines are more reliable than daily newspapers in the quality of their criticism. The magazines, in turn, however, must be separated: those with the "newsy" approach from those containing serious analysis. When one has found out as much as one can about a critic through all the previously discussed channels and has estimated the standards of the publication for which he
writes, one is finally ready to evaluate a critic's work with confidence.

Callas, Tebaldi and Critical Biases

For accurate diagnosis of critical perceptions it is essential that the factors which may cloud critic's objectivity are recognized. The scrupulous critic will include in his review a list of his biases and this particular technique of criticism will be dealt with fully when it occurs in the particular reviews under consideration. It was the nature of the Callas/Tebaldi rivalry that the heated argument and endless comparison it inspired clearly delineated the personal prejudices of many of the major critics. For instance, Irving Kolodin in an article "Callas Remembers Bing" vigourously defends Callas' personal and artistic integrity against the accusations of Rudolf Bing, the Metropolitan Opera Company's strong-willed general manager. Even the best of critics may have his idiosyncratic likes and dislikes and the polarities represented by Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi inevitably brought these biases to the fore. Kolodin's article, was a rebuttal to another selection in the same issue of \textit{Saturday Review} entitled "Bing Remembers Callas," which aired some of Mr. Bing's not always gracious comments about the diva. Kolodin concludes his defense of the controversial singer with the following scathing paragraph:

> Stripping the verbiage from all sides of the story, it is clear that Bing's contention, "I could not have yielded to her urgently expressed whims and continued to keep the Metropolitan going as an artistic enterprise," is a paraphrase for his belief that the Met had room for, in Bing's time, only one prima donna assoluta, the general manager himself. 18

It will be seen in future chapters that Kolodin, though generally a cautious reviewer, often gives the impression of stretching the bounds of his own integrity to praise Callas. The article "Callas Remembers Bing" would certainly seem to be an example of this bias.
A similar bias may be seen in an article by William Weaver entitled "Just Plain Maria."

Behind this fabulous facade there is a fascinating, appealing human being, a girl who, barely past thirty, has struggled hard to get to the top, who by her determined efforts has in these few years made herself a household word wherever the art of singing is considered....

Fortunately for her admirers, she has never been and never will be "just plain" anything. She is something far more thrilling than just an opera star. To the stranger, meeting her for the first time, she may not seem immediately lovable; but the more one knows her, the more one admires her infinite courage and devotion to her work. She doesn't just want to be called the best singer today, she wants to be the best. And she is obviously going to go on fighting, not sparing herself or those around her, towards that goal.19

Writing for *Saturday Review* it is likely that Weaver picked his own topic and had an active interest in Callas to begin with. Furthermore, the tone of the piece suggests the praise of a convert ("...she may not seem immediately lovable, but...etc.") and though the convert often becomes a zealot, his conversion generally results from much soul searching. One might reasonably conclude then, that while anything written by William Weaver about Maria Callas is likely to be biased in her favour, Weaver's bias is clearly the result of thoughtful choice.

However, inference is unnecessary regarding Herbert Weinstock's championship of Callas. His translation of Celli's adulatory analysis of the Callas art engendered a storm of reader controversy. Although the article represented the opinion of another, Weinstock's accordance with this opinion is made plain by the act of translation. In fact, he confessed his partiality publicly in a piece he wrote for *Opera News* in 1965 entitled "Woman of the Week." He prefaces a brief biography of Callas with the avowal that, "The writer of the present article, Callas' friend for more than eight years, continues to believe that she belongs with Mary Garden and Fyodor Chaliapin among the few great singing artists who have been
able to bring dramatic verisimilitude and vitality to what is, after all, at least as much a theatrical as a musical entertainment."20

Weinstock's preference for Callas above other sopranos is made even clearer in an article entitled "Maria, Renata, Zinka...and Leonora" in which he compares the recorded interpretations of these sopranos as the heroine of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. Dismissing both Zinka Milanov and Renata Tebaldi in four gracious, but succinct paragraphs, he devotes nearly twice as much space to Callas. Beginning his review with the statement, "The real glory of this recording is Maria Meneghini Callas," Weinstock concludes, "I judge her to be the most accomplished soprano actress of our time. For the acceptance of that belief, the new recording of "Il Trovatore" happily supplies the most convincing of arguments; a great performance at once serious, accurate, and dazzling."21

An interesting aftermath of Weinstock's comparison of the three singers was the violent reaction which prompted *Saturday Review* to publish a special page of letters to the editor under the title "Maria, Renata, and Zinka." The readers' comments range through effusive expressions of gratitude at having their own opinions so eloquently echoed, to polite and knowledgeable debate on certain points of contention, to virulent disagreement with Weinstock's obvious preference for Callas as Leonora. These letters in so far as they may be considered representative of the readership of *Saturday Review* will be discussed more fully in the final chapter. As they relate to the role of the critic himself, however, one of these letters should be singled out. Donald McDonald, then editor of *The Catholic Message*, chastised Mr. Weinstock for "committing the ancient error of thinking that the musical reputation of one singer can only be built upon the ruins of the reputation of other singers." McDonald
closes his letter with this comment: "Weinstock's shrill petulancy on behalf of Miss Callas seems rather out of place in SR's music department which has, in the past, presented some great musically knowledgeable articles on Gieseking, Chopin interpretors, Toscanini, etc." Here is a fellow journalist warning of the dangers of emotionally based partisanship and suggesting that good criticism should be impassive if not impartial. Roland Gellat writing for the Reporter in 1956 also compares the three divas in his article "The Met's Top Three Sopranos." Though less outspoken in his preference than Weinstock, Gellat also favours Miss Callas. He begins his commentary with the seemingly disparaging description of Callas as "an intense, self-conscious woman who demonstrates better than any since Mary Garden the supremacy of mind over matter. Her voice considered simply as a voice is not a great one." He goes on, however, to praise the results of her compensatory efforts. "On stage Miss Callas is a formidable artist. Her concern for style, allied to keen theatrical sensibility, enables her to dominate a vast opera with imperfect vocal equipment." Tebaldi, too, is initially dealt with harshly when Gellat applies Ernest Newman's quip about Melba to her. "Uninterestingly perfect and perfectly uninteresting." Yet, like Callas, Tebaldi is ultimately given her due. "If it were only for her Desdemona in Verdi's Otello, she would be remembered as a soprano of high achievement; here, particularly in the last act, she evokes exquisitely the aura of subdued innocence that is implicit in the score and she produces some of the most pearly vocalism committed to records in the high-fidelity era." However, Gellat's summation of Miss Tebaldi's artistry, is less enthusiastic than his summation of Miss Callas. "She is, over the loudspeaker and in the opera house, utterly dependable. Perhaps too dependable. Miss Tebaldi's chief
shortcoming is her matter-of-fact approach to the high art of musical characterization." Of Callas he concludes, "In this era of pallid operatic personalities it is refreshing to encounter a singer with a mind at work and with the vitality to project conviction."23

Lest it be thought that Tebaldi had no partisans among the critics, it should be pointed out that Victor Seroff once rhapsodized, "...Oh, who would not give his happiness for her was not a man,"24 and that John Ferris' quietly admiring tribute to Tebaldi was entitled "Angelic Voice."

If Tebaldi's admirers have been less conspicuous and less vehement than those of Callas it is possible that the tranquil aura that the singer created evoked a quieter form of applause. "After all," writes Ferris, "Tebaldi is human, and surely this is why she is so loved."25

The Statistics of Journalistic Criticism

Let us now turn briefly to a report published in 1970 called "Critics and Criticism in the Mass Media" which contains statistics about the effectiveness, integrity, and quality of "that perenially picaresque, impertinent, but ineradicable creature—the mass media critic." Most of the generalities suggested in this chapter are confirmed or at least supported by the report. According to its findings newspapers are regarded by those in the field of journalism as the most influential critical medium with magazines ranking considerably lower and television criticism at the bottom. However, television is believed to be the growing medium for criticism, but it is unfortunately the medium the most plagued by critical superficialities and editorial pressures.

All media, it seems to me, select critics who more or less mirror their audiences. A serious critic should be willing to cut against the grain of his own audience's biases. The values
held by TV-radio take a more serious view of their work; they think that "criticism, to deserve the name, should make some contribution to scholarship..., but the majority are concerned about the tendency to become esoteric and "in-groupy" and to ignore the responsibility of criticism to a broader public."

A significant minority feel pressures upon them to censor, restrict, and slant. They imply that they are keenly aware of the danger and are successful in resisting such pressures--at least the most blatant and crude variety....

The first two sentences of the quotation bear implications which will be discussed in a later chapter. In the meantime, it is significant to note that, New York City critics and editors received more restrictions from within their own organizations than from their colleagues in other parts of the country.

At present most [critics] are journalists who stumble, mainly by chance, into criticism later on in their careers. Half the visible critics felt that they had been hired for their competence as journalists, and half for that competence plus a special background in the field they were to criticize. Only two out of thirty-six art critics, it is interesting to note, felt they were hired solely because of their expertise in the field.

Critics receive little or no special training or supervision on the job. Editors, when they were asked where they would look for likely candidates, most often replied that they would look at people within their own medium or on their own staffs (journalists) and less often at people with formal training and/or expertise in arts.

On the other hand, the majority of critics in all media and on all topics favored "a defined curriculum--broad and interdisciplinary--for students who want to go into criticism as a career." 26

Conclusion

One of the problems inherent in attempting to analyze journalistic criticism is that of organizing the vast amount of disparate data into a comprehensive pattern. The task of exactly matching journals, critics, singers and performances for comparison often proves impossible. A few of the critics about whom information has been proferred in this chapter do not in fact appear in the main body of this thesis. However, the information
has been included in these cases with the thought that it aids in illuminat-
ing some general point about critics, Callas and Tebaldi, or the diffi-
culties involved in acquiring information about critics.

We have now scrutinized the critic as a person and as a professional
to the extent that one of his readers might, given the sources readily
available to the general public. It has been shown that, whereas, the aver-
age reader may seem prone to take the critics word as gospel, the practicing
musician and even fellow critics tend to view him with considerable sus-
pician. The background and critical philosophy of several critics has
been presented. It has also been shown that reputable publications them-
selves may be the best criteria for judging the integrity and the expertise
of the critical analyses they contain, though respectable, well regarded,
newsworthy publications are not necessarily the ones containing the most
complete critical coverage of artistic events. We have touched upon the
personal biases of a few individual critics with regard to the two perform-
ers under observation. Lastly, the effectiveness of all popular criticism
has been examined with newspapers discovered to rank as the most influen-
tial vehicles for ideas.

Before moving on to examine the early careers of Callas and Tebaldi
let us look at the following cautionary statement by music critic Robert
Evett which provides an appropriate closing note to this brief introduc-
tion to the critics:

Newspaper reviews, most of them written under pressure, do not
always say precisely what the reviewer meant. They are ground
out in the middle of the night, usually under pressure, and are
sent to the printers in the first draft. Even if the draft makes
good sense, typesetters, night editors, and emergency cutters can
make hash of it. This being the case, it's hard to understand
why so many people take the stuff of reading it over and over
again for innuendos that were probably never there, and memorizing
the key words and phrases as if they were revelations. But they
do. I do it myself.27
13Ibid.
17Ibid.
18Irving Kolodin, "Callas Remembers Bing, Which Was the Prima Donna?" Saturday Review 55 (October 14, 1972): 41.


A remarkable parallel exists between the careers of Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi. The two women are within a year of one another in age and both underwent similar patterns of musical and vocal training, beginning with piano lessons as children and studying with only one voice teacher throughout. Their early careers also developed along similar lines with each singer becoming the protegee of one of the most highly regarded operatic conductors of the century. Each soprano achieved her initial success through the influence and instruction of her respective maestro. Arturo Toscanini encouraged Tebaldi and Tullio Serafin instructed Callas.

Although Toscanini provided the initial impetus for Tebaldi's career by selecting her as soloist for the reopening of La Scala in 1946, and although she continued to enjoy his patronage for many years, the young soprano succeeded primarily because of natural ability. Years later Victor Seroff reminiscing at the time of her Metropolitan debut described her thus:

In 1946 I had written from Milan that this then youthful internationally unknown soprano would have a triumph if and when she came to New York.

We had met during that summer when she was "the talk of the town." She was then almost twenty-five and the most striking girl of the Italian stage. The tall, dark-haired, blue-eyed diva radiated [so much] beauty, grace and charm...."

On the other hand, Maria Callas with her more intellectually sculpted virtues bloomed later requiring an additional three year gestation period. Coincidentally, Miss Callas' debut at La Scala was as a last minute replacement for the indisposed Tebaldi and, if the saga sung by the popular press has any truth she began immediately to edge her predecessor out the stage door. Whether Callas actually made a calculated effort to stamp out Tebaldi's supremacy at La Scala, or whether Tebaldi herself decided to move
onto new territory, the fact remains that Tebaldi sang less and less at the house that had been her operatic home.

Tebaldi in San Francisco

Inevitably, the United States beckoned Tebaldi. Already her reputation as the radiant, serene leading lady of one of the world's great opera houses had reached America, and there was no shortage of interest or offers forthcoming from New York. Somewhat surprisingly, however, it was the San Francisco Opera Company rather than the Metropolitan which managed to obtain her first. She made her American debut in San Francisco opening the 1950 season with *Aida* and following with performances as Desdemona and *Tosca*. *Time Magazine* covered the performances, thus, giving Tebaldi her first national exposure in the American press. In an article entitled "Beating the Met" she was described as, "Tall and expressive" and making "a big impression both physically and vocally....Her flexible and powerful voice, known in the U. S. only on records brought down the house in her first (Ritorna vinicitor) and third-act (Patria mia) arias." 2

Marjorie M. Fisher, San Francisco correspondent for *Musical America* wrote the following brief review of two of Tebaldi's performances:

San Francisco's 28th annual opera season opened in the War Memorial Opera House on Sept. 26 with a performance of Verdi's *Aida* that aroused more interest than usual on the part of the traditionally fashion-conscious, capacity audience, for three singers of international reputation were making their American operatic debuts....

Tall and good looking, Miss Tebaldi made an exceptionally fine appearance on stage, although her acting was characterized by the use of stock, stilted gestures. Her voice, not outstandingly lustrous in quality, was at its best in the pianissimo passages of the Nile Scene, and she sang beautifully with telling artistry.

*Otello*, on Oct. 10, brought Renata Tebaldi as Desdemona and Ramon Vinay in the title role.

Miss Tebaldi was not a very delicate figure as Desdemona, but she was always pretty and graceful. She did full justice to the Verdi score, and sang the Ave Maria in particular, with
rare beauty. Her pianissimos were exquisite, and her singing was magnificently controlled.

Too detailed a dissection of such brief comments might prove misleading. However, several points are worth noting. First, this critic, in both cases chose to mention the physical impact of the performer in the role before analysing her voice and her singing. Despite the implied primacy of dramatic effectiveness over beautiful singing and her disparaging description of Miss Tebaldi's "stock, stilted gestures" and "Not [a] very delicate figure," Miss Fisher was content to offset the lack of accurate detail of characterization with the generally attractive physical appearance of the singer coupled with her ability to move through the drama without jarring the mood or the storyline. Fisher's critical eye narrowed when considering Tebaldi's vocal accomplishments. The voice, which had already thrilled Europe and which was later to be often referred to as "one of the voices of the century," received a lukewarm reception in this instance being judged as "not outstandingly lustrous in quality." Even taking into account the vagaries of the human vocal instrument, the critic's summation is indicative of the lofty standards being applied. Tebaldi seems to have redeemed herself in Fisher's estimation, however, by her technical expertise and her feeling for the music.

Similarly Irving Kolodin, covering the same San Francisco performances for Saturday Review, mentioned Miss Tebaldi's acting in cursory fashion at the end of his comments on her singing of Aida. Of Puccini's Tosca he went on to note that:

...Miss Tebaldi's superbly pliant voice, her feel for line and phrase, her responsive sense of drama dominate everything else. ['Meyerberian display' cluttering the first two acts of Aida].

However, the crux of Tosca is Act II, and there Tebaldi drives over and beyond the limitations of her associates to a singular auditory experience. Not only does she carry the dramatic load womanfully on her shoulders, she imparts a cold
fury to the destruction of Scarpia which, for once, gives reality to these theatrics.
However, she is decidedly less the voice for the Tosca of Act I, in which she overplays the capriciousness of the character in rather shrill tones.

As in Fisher's review, the technical skill and musicality of the singer were accorded the greatest importance and the highest praise. Although in Tosca Tebaldi was given greater credit for effective acting than she had been accorded for Aida, the remarks again consisted of vague generalizations. The comment, "Carry the dramatic load womanfully on her shoulders," whether intentionally or not, gives the impression that if a singer trudges through an opera without committing too many blatant physical faux pas, she has given an acceptable acting performance; and that the phrase "cold fury" used to describe the opera's dramatic high point suggests acting of the first order. We see that both the most and least effective communicative gestures in the performance are inseparable from the quality of the singing, the success of Tebaldi's performance being equated to the "singular auditory experience" she imparted to Act II and the weakness being equated to her "shrill tones" of Act I.

The three reviews just examined represent the exposure given Renata Tebaldi's American debut by the national press. Now let us turn to Maria Callas and her progress toward her American debut.

Callas' Early Career

While Tebaldi was modestly and methodically cultivating her blossoming rapport with the American opera going public, Maria Meneghini Callas was perfecting her craft under the tutelage of Maestro Tullio Serafin who had been the first person of influence to recognize potential in the fat, bespectacled girl with the big, unorthodox voice. Callas learned her vocal technique from two people: her voice teacher, Elvira de Hildalgo, a famous Spanish coloratura soprano, taught her how to sing for dramatic effect;
and Serafin taught her the process by which to discover dramatic details in the music insisting that, "If you want to learn the action, look at the music and you will find every stage movement written there by the composer."

Callas in an article entitled "Callas, Serafin, and the art of Bel Canto," described the detailed method of characterization which Serafin taught and which he expected of his singers.

He was an extraordinary coach, sharp as a vecchio lupo ("sly fox"). He opened a world to me, showed me there was a reason for everything, that even the fioritura and trills, all the coloratura things have a reason in the composer's mind, that they are the expression of the *stat d'animo* of the character—that is, the way he feels at that moment, the passing emotions that take hold of him.  

As the young soprano continued to work tirelessly under the Maestro's guidance she began to receive more and more ecstatic praise. Interestingly enough in view of later developments, this praise was initially directed, more to the strange beauty of her voice, to her intelligent musicianship and to the remarkable flexibility and versatility of her singing than to her acting abilities. The following brief excerpts from the Italian press clearly illustrate this focus:

One of the most amazing voices in present-day Italy.  

Hers is not a light voice, but she negotiated the most difficult coloratura without batting an eye, and her downward glissandi made cold shivers run up and down the hearer's spine.  

Old timers at La Scala pronounced her singing sensational. Milan critics kissed their finger-tips in ecstasy over her "sureness," her "miraculous throat" and the phosphorescent beauty of her middle range.  

About the time she began to acquire artistic success, Callas also acquired an artistic "angel" in the guise of a wealthy husband. Like Seraphin, Batista Meneghini, a successful Turin industrialist and ardent opera buff, saw something special in the Greek-American girl then making a rather discouraging circuit of the lesser Italian opera houses. He married her. Unhappy, ungrainly, ambitious Maria now possessed financial security and emotional support...
as well as the guidance of a great conductor/director, and the butterfly emerged from the cocoon. In one summer Callas lost 40 pounds and gained the grace, poise and sophistication that has become her hallmark. And it was from this point in her career that her reputation as an actress began to emerge. Rudolf Bing in an excerpt from his memoirs made the following comments on the celebrated metamorphosis: "She looked as though she had been born to that elegance. Now it became urgent for the Metropolitan to have her." 9

Debut Chicago - Taking America by Storm

The Metropolitan, however, did not immediately "have" Callas. With her husband now acting as her business manager, the rising diva began to develop a keen awareness of her value as an operatic commodity. Rather than make a straight-forward debut at the Metropolitan as just one of many new singers engaged by that august company, she chose to make her debut in North America with the newly formed Chicago Lyric Company. The strategy proved effective. Despite the lesser company and despite the then relatively unfamiliar opera, Norma by Bellini which she chose as her debut vehicle, the attention which the press accorded the event easily quadrupled that given to Miss Tebaldi's more modest coming out in San Francisco. Life Magazine covered the gala opening of the Chicago season with a three page pictorial article headlined "Opera Is Grand Again in Chicago," 10 and Time and Newsweek both featured reviews of the performance headlined "Soprano Triumphant" and "Sensation in Chicago" respectively.

Newsweek summed up Callas' performance by acknowledging that in a role which "requires great range and remarkable flexibility," Callas made it "apparent that she has an abundance of both" and concluded that the tremendous crowd response "sealed acceptance of Maria Meneghini Callas as one of the greatest singing actresses of our time." 11 The remainder of Newsweek's
account focused on the social aspects of the event, the performances of the other singers and of the diva's various off-stage tantrums. *Time*, though giving substantial coverage to the more frivolous aspects of the occasion, did, nevertheless, provide a conscientious analysis of Callas' performance according equal and relatively detailed consideration to both her vocal and acting achievement.

...Soprano Callas lived up to her reputation. With her lissome figure handsomely clad in white and crimson, she looked almost too young and beautiful to be a pagan high priestess. She made a minimum of movement on-stage, achieved precise dramatic effects by the tilt of her head or the angle of her body, but also electrified the crowd with slashing moments of violence, as when she confronted her faithless lover in Act II. Her voice ranged from flutely pianissmos that penetrated to the last row of the distant balcony to mezzo-fortes of melting sweetness to forties of trumpeting and often edgy fierceness. She may not have the most beautiful voice in the world (a credit often reserved for Italy's Renata Tebaldi or the Metropolitan Opera's Zinka Milanov), but she is certainly the most exciting singer.

The two distinctive notes struck by the *Time* reviewer are his observation of Callas' accurate and economical use of her physical resources and his perception of the clearly conceived and communicated emotional phrasing of her singing.

Theatre Arts and Musical America representing more specialized points of view, also gave space to the debut performance. The former, however interested more in the event than the artistry, confined its critical remarks to the declaration that, "Whatever the doubts or questions, Mme. Callas hurdled them with ease. In Chicago she was not only a singer with rare range and flexibility, she was also a remarkable dramatic actress as well." Ronald Eyer in Musical America gave a more complete evaluation of the evening, beginning his review with a brief analysis of the opera Norma, detailing the vocal and dramatic demands of the title role, finally giving his opinion as to how well Miss Callas coped with her task.

Beginning with the famous "Casta diva" with its long-spun
vocal line and five high C's, the vocal demand is relentless and gets no easier as things move along.

Immediately it was clear that Maria Meneghini Callas—American-born girl who long since conquered Milan's La Scala but, until now, known to her own countrymen only on recordings—is one of the great dramatic coloraturas of our generation.

The voice is excitingly big, vividly colored and meticulously schooled.

She molds a line as deftly as she tosses off cruelly difficult ornamentations in the highest register. And she brings to everything a passion, a profile of character and a youthful beauty that are rare in our lyric theatre.

It is possible to find flaws in Miss Callas' technique—an occasional spread tone in high fortissimo; a troublesome tremolo in pianissimo. But the net effect is what counts, and that is grand opera singing in the grandest manner.

Vocal beauty and vocal skill were apparently the considerations uppermost in Eyer's mind. Yet in contrast to Miss Fisher's review in the same publication five years earlier which had faulted Renata Tebaldi's "not outstandingly lustrous voice," it is significant to find in Eyer's review that the "flaws in Maria Callas' technique" are glossed over in deference to the overall effectiveness of the performance. It is of further interest to note that Eyer was particularly impressed by the carefully wrought detail of the performance, and to speculate that because of Callas' high degree of artistic achievement he was inspired to write a denser critique of Norma than Miss Fisher had written in the same publication of Tebaldi's debut in San Francisco. "She molds a line as deftly as she tosses off cruelly difficult ornamentations in the highest register," is surely a more communicative statement than, "She sang beautifully with telling artistry;" and, "...She brings to everything a passion, a profile of character and a youthful beauty that are rare in our lyric theater," says more than, "She was always pretty and graceful."

Writing in the same complimentary vein, James Hinton, Jr. for the New York Times hailed Norma as "no doubt the finest achievement of the season so far." In basic accordance with Eyer he agreed that, "the sound of Miss
Callas' voice is only part of her effectiveness in the opera house. As those who have heard her by means of electronics know, she can be disconcertingly uneven and she has been in Chicago." In this summation of her acting, Hinton suggested the subtlety and aptness of detail that distinguish the work of any intelligent and competent artist. "Tall and slender, Miss Callas in the ritual scenes left the audience in no doubt as to why the Gauls submit to Norma's authority. But she was not merely imperious. What was really most impressive was the emotional range that she brought to the human side of her characterization."15

The only major critic of national scope to cover both Miss Tebaldi's and Miss Callas' debuts in the U. S. was Irving Kolodin. He began his review of the Chicago performance with the pronouncement that Callas held the attention of the socially-minded opening night audience by "sheer force of talent and personality...." He went on to observe that,

The qualities that made Miss Callas' recorded Norma notable are only the beginning of the effect it makes in the theatre. London knew her as a heavy-set, not-too-active figure when she sang Norma in Covent Garden early in 1953. She has, since then slimmed considerably (as much as 40 lbs. by some calculations.) and is now an electric figure on the stage, charged with a sense of dramatic fitness with alternating currents of fury and repose producing a very direct result on her listeners. I couldn't make out in the mostly dim lighting of Norma whether she is anything close to pretty, but she is certainly as comely as Norma need be.

Vocally, the sound Miss Callas produces may best be characterized as peculiar for it adheres to no conventional concept of tone production. It is substantially an instrumental concept of the human voice she espouses; and like all the great instrumentalists, she uses it for intensely artistic ends. This is no screamer, no calculation of audience effect. She works on, and with, the voice almost externally. Now shading it to a thin line of filigree in "Casta Diva," later exploding its vengeful power in denunciation of the perfidious Pollione. It is a measure of Maria Callas' increasing command of her remarkable instrument that this "spot," "Casta Diva," was even better articulated than the recorded one, that she flung off C's with abandon and a climaxing D♭ at the end of Act II with assurance. One thing seems certain: it will get a lot better before it gets worse. She impresses one as that kind of worker.16

Although Kolodin's review is longer and more detailed in its analysis of the
Chicago event than any of the reviews mentioned previously, he was elaborating on three points suggested by the shorter critiques. First, Miss Callas' ability to command the stage and the audience was the result of a combination of vocal sound and physical presence. Second, her talent for inventing original and appropriate details breathed life and credibility into the role. And third, she was able to dominate the musical as well as the theatrical aspects of performance. It is interesting to note that whereas Tebaldi's appearance, naturally comely and statuesque, was nearly always remarked upon as a point in her favor, Callas' actual "looks" were of little interest to the commentators, although she had by this time become a strikingly attractive woman in her own right. In fact, Kolodin off-handedly, though perhaps intentionally so, glossed over the subject. One important new facet of Callas' achievement which Kolodin highlights in this article is the artist's considerable artistic integrity. In the midst of the lurid tales of her off-stage behaviour, he discerned an on-stage personality which reflected taste and restraint.

Yet the most intriguing aspect of Kolodin's review is the implied paradox between his analysis of Miss Callas' acting and her vocal techniques. He credited her with being an "electric figure on the stage," but his description of her singing style ("It is substantially an instrumental concept of the human voice she espouses.... She works on and with the voice almost externally.") could be construed as suggesting she was a detached and almost dispassionate technician. Later reviews will reinforce this apparent dichotomy for, although no critic ever claimed that Callas sang "from the heart," the strong emotional effect which her highly technical performances had on her audiences was undeniable.
Establishing a Basis for Comparison

The preceding reviews complete the national journalistic reports of the American debut performances of two of the most popular and highly regarded sopranos of the middle years of this century. Though similarities are evident, the different circumstances surrounding the two debuts must be kept in mind in order to make an accurate analysis of their critical reception. What is being sought through this analysis is not the discovery of the unique merits of the two singers, but the detection of those general characteristics which the critics chose to signal their approbation. At first glance it would seem that the combination of talents and skills which Maria Callas possessed constituted the magic formula for overwhelming critical success. However, when we remember how much further Callas was than Tebaldi in her artistic development and keep in mind the extensive press exposure Callas received prior to her arrival (half-a-dozen mentions in Musical America alone concerning her European performances; several record reviews; and cover stories in both Time and Newsweek), we might conclude that the critics were victims of their own press releases. The argument has sometimes been preferred by Callas' detractors that the American critics allowed themselves to be swept up in a wave of "Callas mania" and in turn contributed further to the furor. This, a veritable avalanche of "show biz" publicity was created for a shrewd, but inferior performer. In future chapters, reviews from a later period when Tebaldi's public fame and reputation as an artist had grown enormously and when Callas was suffering vocal difficulties will refute this accusation. However, taking the critic at his word, one must conclude that Tebaldi presented the traditional ideal, that is a maximum of beautiful vocal display and minimum of theatrical flair, and that Callas' abilities were from the first unconventional and unique.
The Balance of Critical Values, An Emerging Pattern

A pattern of critical evaluation begins to emerge from even this small sampling of opera reviews. The first thing that the reviewer looks for, especially in the case of a new performer, is a quality which is the summation of all the performer's resources and which is probably best described as "presence." The social phenomenon of opera is very much in evidence in these reviews (Kolodin and Fisher make direct mention of it and most of the reviews imply a strong interest), and the critic often seems to regard the ability to command the scattered attention of a somewhat frivolous house by sheer strength of presence to be an indication of a singer's "artistic" merit. In his process of evaluation, the critic then appears to take the initial impact of the performer and holds it up to the character being portrayed to see how well the "presence" fits the part; and, if there are a few recognizable points of similarity, he is satisfied with the character interpretation and proceeds to listen to the music. It is to the execution of the music that the critic brings his most exacting criteria to bear, demanding a high calibre of vocal performance as the basis of operatic competence. Finally, the acting abilities of the performer are taken into consideration and usually judged as leniently as possible (especially if the ear has been ravished) with any manifestation of skill over and above a suitable "presence" being regarded as a bonus.

The idea of placing equal value on the musical and the theatrical effectiveness of operatic performance seems generally to be acknowledged as correct and desirable by the critics examined thus far. The discrepancy, however, between the standards applied to the art of singing and those applied to the art of acting often renders such a union meaningless. When upon rare occasion, the artist's acting skill is something other than
pedestrian, the balance of standards shifts. Because her acting did not contribute any particular insight into the characters she portrayed, Tebaldi's singing bore the brunt of critical scrutiny and her vocal accomplishment suffered, under such undivided attention. Callas, who created Norma using physical as well as vocal resources, deflected some attention from her vocal and musical attributes with the result that the reviewers changed their critical focus. This is not necessarily to imply that the critics lowered their standards, for in Callas' case it was made quite clear that her singing was, in its own fashion, impressive. Rather, the concept of outstanding singing as the sole criterium of operatic excellence seems to swell into more expansive principles than mere note-by-note, tone-by-tone perfection. "The sound of Miss Callas' voice is only part of her effectiveness in the opera house."

"Vocally, the sound Miss Callas produces may best be characterized as peculiar for it adheres to no conventional concept of tone production...[but]...she uses it for intensely artistic ends." "She may not have the most beautiful voice in the world, but she is certainly the most exciting singer."

Conclusion

Perhaps the most interesting and the most significant point to bring up for further speculation at the conclusion of this chapter is the fact that although the critics themselves seem to acknowledge a differentiation between singing skills and acting skills, very often the most vivid and meaningful comments in a review about the histrionics of a performance appear to be applied to vocal considerations. Some examples of this have already been mentioned with regards to Tebaldi, and Callas, too, inspired a mixture of analytic genres. "...Her downward glissandi made cold
shivers run up and down the bearer's spine." "Her voice ranged from flutely pianissimos...to mezzofortes of melting sweetness to fortes of trumpeting and often edgy fierceness." Callas "...is now an electric figure on the stage, charged with a sense of dramatic fitness with alternating currents of fury and repose producing a very direct result on the listeners."

Tebaldi continued to make occasional appearances in the U. S. including the second season of the Chicago Lyric Theatre Company where she alternated with Callas programming which created an even more spectacular season than the opening one of 1954. Finally, in the winter of 1955 Tebaldi came to the Metropolitan Opera Company as Desdemona in Verdi's Otello. After another highly successful season in Chicago, Callas followed Tebaldi to the Met in October, 1956, performing once again the opera which had served her so well in Chicago, Norma.

2"Beating the Met," *Time* 56 (October 9, 1950): 44.


8"Sensation at La Scala," *Time* 59 (April 21, 1952): 79.


CHAPTER III - CONQUERING THE MET

It has been the rare singer indeed who has triumphed in America without first succeeding at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. Two notable exceptions have been Mary Garden and Beverly Sills. Early in this century Garden reigned as prima donna assoluta from her throne at the Chicago Civic Opera Company, and more recently Sills, who built her reputation with the New York City Opera Company received much publicity because her refusal to sign a season contract with the more prestigious Metropolitan was so unusual. We have seen in the previous chapter how Tebaldi and Callas, both of whom had received offers from the Metropolitan, chose to circle warily before approaching the shrine of American opera. Tebaldi, whose psyche was not of iron and whose temperament had always lacked arrogance, may well have been attempting to ease herself gradually into the potentially caustic climate of New York operatic opinion; or she may simply have been waiting for an offer from New York that she felt would display her talent to its best advantage. Callas, on the other hand, was embroiled in skirmishes with the Met's general manager Rudolf Bing long before she made her appearance in Chicago. While Bing was attempting to hire Callas at a fee she considered insufficient using his company's awesome reputation and influence as leverage, the shrewd prima donna saw an opportunity in Chicago to impress America on her own terms. (See Appendix for further details regarding the early careers of Callas and Tebaldi.) However, whatever their reasons for delaying the inevitable, each soprano finally decided to face New York.
Tebaldi's Desdemona

Characteristically, Tebaldi's Metropolitan debut was a modest affair. She chose the taxing, but brief role of Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello* and sang it in a regular subscription performance in February 1955. Desdemona is not a role usually chosen for a debut. As conceived by Verdi and his librettist Boito the role is gentle and passive. Indeed, passivity would seem to be the key to Desdemona's character. Her most important musical and dramatic moments come near the end of the evening, with relatively little of musical importance to focus interest on her in the early acts. *Time Magazine* had run a feature article on Tebaldi, and there was the usual publicity in preparation for her arrival at the Met; but, on the whole, the undeniable excitement of her debut was confined to well informed opera fans.

Ronald Eyer reporting for *Musical America* described the mood of the audience as follows:

Great anticipitory interest was generated in the New York debut of the Scala soprano Renata Tebaldi as Desdemona. The house was filled to the doors with eager wellwishers and the bursting enthusiasm was not ill-placed.

He reported that, "She seemed a bit tentative at first," but went on to praise the all-important final act and the general impression which her performance created.

*I found* it difficult to recall any previous occasion when I have heard the "Willow Song" and "Ave Maria" sung so poignantly, with such direct communication of feeling and with such consummate musicianship.

Miss Tabaldi is the complete mistress of her vocal mechanism. She can sing with as much control at pianissimo as at full voice; and, at pianissimo, her voice has that coveted quality of projection that permits it to make its way clearly and cleanly through the orchestral fabric. Miss Tebaldi also is a woman of infinite grace, serenity and personal charm. She is the consummate diva, who has already conquered her audience before she has uttered a sound. Anyone who heard her in the relatively unrewarding role of Desdemona cannot but be impatient
to hear her in other more revealing characterizations.\textsuperscript{1} Eyer’s enthusiasm had been aroused but not entirely satisfied.

Whether by instinct or design, Tebaldi picked a role whose brevity and modest dramatic range worked to her advantage. The part gave her ample time on stage to prepare for the two difficult arias which, by virtue of their sheer beauty and their late placement in the opera leave a strong musical and dramatic impression. It also leaves the audience wanting more. It is interesting to note that Desdemona represents one of the most successful portrayals of an entirely "good" character ever achieved by an operatic composer. Thus, Tebaldi took her first step to American stardom as a totally sympathetic character.

Not all the critics were equally impressed, however. Irving Kolodin was admiring but restrained in his review. He discussed the excellence of her vocal technique and her musicality at some length.

From the first tones of her duet with Otello to the final beautifully controlled A flat pianissimo the "Ave Maria" which, perversely, unleashed a chorus of "bravas," Mme. Tebaldi sang with a maximum of composure and a minimum of vocal strain, with a sweeping command of every useful technical device for floating, spinning or thrusting tone over, under or with an orchestra. She wisely saved her major effort for Act IV—the only time in the whole opera when she is alone on the stage—in a superb "Willow Song" and an even more absorbing "Ave Maria", but there was no moment earlier when she did not attend to every musical requirement of Verdi in a demonstration of composure not often encountered in such circumstances.

Of the voice itself, however, he had reservations. "Hers is an impressive rather than an eloquent instrument but she strikes one as the kind of artist whose cultivation and obvious refinement of purpose will steadily grow in the public affection." Kolodin’s description of the soprano’s acting was even less admiring.
If anything this iron-willed control (Mme. Tebaldi could hardly have been indifferent to the occasion) related to the only reservation roused by the performance. This was a certain lack of dramatic impact, of stage vibrance and immediate audience appeal. A big handsome woman of gracious presence and easy movement, Mme. Tebaldi has, apparently, been schooled to regard the beautiful sound as more important than the incisive meaning. No one is going to quibble with beautiful sound on the Tebaldi level; let us hope for the impossible and regard her Desdemona, model of vocal art that it was, as but the beginning of her success as a dramatic artist.²

Here Kolodin has deliberately called attention to a seeming contradiction in his analysis by finding fault from a dramatic point of view with that which he deemed exceptional and commendable in the singing. The critic made it clear that "attending to every musical requirement" may actively have interfered with attending to the dramatic requirements of the role. We will return to this dichotomy when we consider Kolodin's partisanship of Maria Callas.

Turning to the prestigious New York Times we find that Olin Downes proffered only tentative criticism of Miss Tebaldi's performance partially in deference to the strain of the occasion, but primarily because he missed the last act in the race to make his deadline. He described his reaction to the performance as "mixed" in contrast to that of the majority of the audience which welcomed her "in royal fashion." Unlike Kolodin, Downes found her singing to lack in discipline and felt that her voice would "yield more uniformly beautiful results when it was under complete control." Her acting ability Downes described in the following manner: "As an actress she is a beautiful spectacle—a beautiful woman, and in appearance, last night like a figure from an old Florentine painting." Here again we are presented with criteria which implies that as long as a performer can fit into a generalized scheme of dramatic appropriateness, his or her acting ability is deemed acceptable. In this particular case, the critic asked only that the singer fill her space in the static tableau
as prettily as possible. Yet oddly enough, Downes found that, "She was at her best in the lyrical passages that did not require too much in the direction of brilliancy or dramatic emphasis." It would seem that the critic did not find her quite as adequate an actress as his earlier statement would lead one to believe. However, in his final summation of Tebaldi's abilities Downs says, "All that Miss Tebaldi did impressed us by what it implied; sometimes by what it accomplished; always by her inherent artistic consciousness and capacity to communicate emotion, which she did, impressively, even when her throat did not respond completely to her wishes." Downes seemed almost to have contradicted himself. What exactly is the singer's "capacity to communicate emotion", if she was mostly successful in "passages that did not require too much in the direction of brilliancy or dramatic emphasis"? Given these limitations, the range of emotions that Tebaldi commanded could not have been wide.

The apparent, contradictions in the reviews of Downes and Kolodin may seem small and hazy points to warrant much discussion, but they are worth examining precisely because of their vagueness. In Downes' review there are three statements relating to the acting ability of the singer and there is the suggestion of contradiction amongst them. Perhaps these contradictions may in part be explained by the technical problems of newspaper journalism discussed in Chapter I, lack of time and space and little control by the reviewer over final editing. However, since similar contradictions have been noted both in the present and the preceding chapters, it seems safe to assume that the apparent confusion regarding the place of acting in opera which so often manifested itself in operatic reviews grew out of a genuine ambivalence in the minds of the critics. The result of this critical ambivalence was that the reader was presented with a
very confusing view what musical and dramatic factors contribute to operatic excellence.

Winthrop Sargeant, the last of the major reviewers covering Tebaldi's debut, presented a more cohesive point of view than his colleagues. His criticisms of nearly every aspect of the soprano's performance were uniformly severe. His opening description of her Desdemona was polite, but decidedly lukewarm. "My own reactions to Miss Tebaldi's performance, quite pleasurable for the most part, was somewhat more restrained than most of the rest of her public. Miss Tebaldi is an extremely handsome woman with a large voice of rich emotional power, and hence a very valuable addition to the Metropolitan's roster." Curiously, Sargeant's evaluation of Tebaldi's performance was in many respects diametrically opposed to Eyer's, Kolodin's and Downes'. Whereas, the other critics agreed that she started weakly, but gained momentum as she gained confidence, Sargeant said "She was at her best in the love scene of the first act, which she sang with both passion and poetic feeling." And while his colleagues praised her musicianship, this journalist complained that, "Her performance as a whole relied a little too heavily on impulsive and rather arbitrary vocal mannerisms, which sometimes marred the classic simplicity of Verdi's long and noble melodic phrases." Sargeant referred only obliquely to her histrionic abilities, but contrary to the other reviewers, he seemed to imply that, if anything, she was guilty of overacting. Of the "Ave Maria" he said, "She sang with a great deal of fervour, but without the poise and artful naïveté that would have given it unforgettable magic." Finally Sargeant observed, "Miss Tebaldi's Desdemona was not a great one. But it had a pleasingly lush and impassioned quality nevertheless." Although Sargeant, unlike other critics, did not seem to contradict himself, his
review, standing as it did in direct opposition to those of his most dis­tinctly distinguished colleague, does little to clarify the standards by which opera critics in general may be assumed to judge a performance.

Judging by the four preceding reviews Tebaldi's debut was not a critical triumph, however much the audiences may have loved her. If her choice of Desdemona was a deliberate tactic to fend off the critics, it was only partially successful. The reviewers we have studied indicated various combinations of mixed feelings about the performance. Only Eyer could be suspected of having confused the sympathetic nature of the role with the quality of the singing. The remaining critics, however, were careful to consider the brevity and limitations of the role and reserved their judgement of Tebaldi's merits until such time as they had observed a more complete display of her abilities. Only Winthrop Sargeant took exception to her interpretation of a virtually foolproof role, implying that she had overplayed the sympathetic aspects of the character and the music beyond the bounds of good taste. It should be noticed that each reviewer made special mention of the enthusiasm with which the crowd greeted the soprano, and one might speculate as to whether their own conserv­ative responses were in some part a simple reaction against the general effusion. It should be kept in mind, however, that whatever the critics' conclusions clearly they were each judging Tebaldi by their highest stand­ards of excellence.

Norma at the Met

In strong contrast to Tebaldi's quiet debut as Desdemona, Maria Callas' first appearance at the Metropolitan in November of 1956 was one of the most publicized operatic events of the century. The press coverage was comprehensive. Time, Saturday Review and Nation each ran cover stories
on the singer and several other magazines featured extensive articles on her career. Many newspapers including the *New York Times* conducted interviews with the glamourous soprano. Since Callas’ highly successful debut in Chicago two years previously, the war of wills between Callas and Rudolf Bing which eventually resulted in the soprano’s first appearance with the Metropolitan Opera Company had been followed by the news media as avidly as the latest negotiations of the Cold War. By the time an agreement was reached nearly everyone in the country, whether interested in opera or not, was acquainted with the growing legend of the temperamental diva. As the opening of the Met season approached, the proliferation of articles and interviews increased and Callas’ opinions on everything from music to marriage were common knowledge. She had won most of her skirmishes with Bing, settling on a fee considerably higher than the company’s customary top fee of $1000 per performance and dictating that her debut coincide with the honorary event of the season’s opening performance. Neither privilege had been accorded nor perhaps sought by Tebaldi.

Whether deliberately or not, Callas did everything possible to focus maximum attention on herself on that greatly anticipated evening when she stepped onto the Metropolitan stage for the first time as Norma, the role in which she had triumphed in Chicago. The one battle she had conceded to Rudolf Bing, use of the company’s old and somewhat shabby sets and costumes, lessened even further the possibility of anything distracting from her own performance. Perhaps inevitably considering the overwhelming publicity it had received, the performance was an anticlimax. Some disappointment would hardly have been surprising had Callas been at her spectacular best, and she was not in top form. Despite her bravado,
Callas was obviously all too aware of the significance of the occasion and chose to keep her artistry under tight control rather than risk the headlong performance she had given in Chicago. *Newsweek* reported rumours to the effect that, "Back in Italy where she has ruled ruthlessly over La Scala for the last five years, the betting was widespread that La Callas would cancel on the ground that discretion in the face of the biggest advance build up of the last quarter century was in fact the better part of valor." The reviewer went on to report that for the first two acts, "It was apparent that cold concentration was dampening some of the passionate fires that generally illumine Callas' performance."\(^5\)

In basic agreement with *Newsweek*, *Theatre Arts* puzzled over Callas' "automaton-like approach never apparent during her triumph in Chicago", observing that she, "...Was patently nervous and appeared to overcome her jitters through the application of mind over matter, thus producing a stage figure that never came alive except for a few moments here and there in the last two acts."\(^6\) *Life Magazine* on the other hand was impressed with her "high powered display of histrionics" and commented both on the power and the subtlety of her portrayal. Nevertheless, *Life* went on to comment that, "Less impressive than the acting was the celebrated voice which went shrill and off-pitch between some flights of pure beauty."\(^7\)

Perhaps the guarded mood of the audience at this event was a contributing factor to Callas' caution. Her high-handed behaviour off stage dared people to find fault with her performance, and her less than gracious attitude toward other singers had turned their fans, notably Tebaldi's, aggressively antagonistic. However, despite an initially cool reception and a calculated performance Callas received eleven final curtain calls and broke with Metropolitan tradition by taking a solo bow. Ronald Eyer described the scene as proof of her final triumph.
Deliberately violating a strict rule of the house, Mario Del Monaco and Cesare Siepi withdrew during one of the calls, leaving Callas alone on the stage. This was the signal for the audience to express their opinion directly of the home-town girl who had become a reigning queen of La Scala before most people here had even heard of her, and the storm of applause and cheers could leave no doubt of their verdict.

His summation of her performance, however, was less complimentary than his review of her Chicago performance.

It (her Metropolitan Norma) is more restrained in action, more deliberate and yet somehow less imposing. She is a fine actress and she obviously has studied every detail of her role with the greatest care. However, she is treating her voice more kindly now and is no longer putting it through the torturous paces in the interest of emotional expression which, in Chicago, made one fear for its safety yet provided such dramatic excitement as to seem well worth the risk. As a result, the voice, which is not a sensuously beautiful one shows the effects of more cautious manipulation and more care in focusing both as to pitch and color, especially in the upper reaches. As a result too, the so-called "registers" are not so disconcertingly evident, although there is now a certain monotony in the quality. Miss Callas is a highly schooled singer who knows precisely what she is doing at every moment, though what she does may not always enrapture the ear.

It seems likely from the preceding excerpt that Eyer took the trouble to re-read his Chicago review for he seemed deliberately to be re-examining his original claims. His first review of Callas praised the emotionalism which she injected into her singing and faulted her occasional lack of vocal precision. In his New York review he indicated that she had conscientiously corrected the very flaws he noted two years previously; however, Eyer seemed to feel that she had done so at the expense of both the dramatic and the vocal impact of her performance.

Writing in a more favourable vein Howard Taubman began his review with a word of thanks to Miss Callas for making opera "The Thing" for the first Metropolitan season opening night in years. He was also careful to preface his specific comments on the performer with a brief analysis of the extreme difficulties presented by the opera in general and by
the role of Norma in particular. Taubman began his evaluation of Callas' performance with a close look at her acting. In his comments he suggested both the careful attention to detail which she applied to her characterization and the wide range of her dramatic effectiveness. However, Taubman like Eyer did not fail to observe the iron control of the soprano and its detrimental effect on her dramatic persuasiveness.

She brought to the role the concentration of one who had studied it thoroughly. Every move, every gesture was planned....It may be that some of her gestures may turn out to be too calculated on some occasions. There were moments last night when they gave the effect of being used for effect rather than from any inner necessity of the role.

The Times critic observed that the sheer effort of the ordeal told on Callas' vocal performance as well. In general, Taubman was not enthusiastic about her singing, though he conceded that "when she did not force her voice had delicacy and point." He concluded his analysis of the debut by comparing the performance with the Norma of Rosa Ponselle and by offering Callas two tepid compliments.

This reviewer can remember only one Norma, Rosa Ponselle, who could sing the entire role without any sense of strain and with un broken purity. Miss Callas may be forgiven a lack of velvet in parts of her range. She is brave to do Norma at all. She brings sufficient dramatic and musical values to her performance to make it an interesting one.

The slightly condescending air of the New York Times review typified according to Winthrop Sargeant the prevailing tone of the dailies in their morning post mortems of Callas' Metropolitan debut. The New Yorker critic made a special point of analyzing public and professional feeling surrounding the opening performance of the season. He described it as having "something of the atmosphere of the invasion of a local tennis tournament by a star outsider" and named Renata Tebaldi and Zinka Milanov as representatives of the "home team". He also noted that the critics
were not above a defensive reaction to the high-powered publicity which the soprano had elicited and perhaps solicited prior to her performance. The majority of the critics also tended toward coolness, and their reviews next day betrayed a firm determination not to be stamped by the eloquence of her advance billing. Now that the shouting and the compensatory frigidity has somewhat abated, I think it should be possible to arrive at a detached estimate of Miss Callas' gifts which do not in any way resemble those of Miss Tebaldi or Miss Milanov and which, to my mind, are by no means inconsiderable.

It should be recalled that Sargeant had paid similar attention to the emotional climate of Tebaldi's Metropolitan debut but had in that instance designated himself as "somewhat more restrained than the rest of her public" in his enthusiasm. In his Callas review he indicated that while he was less excited than her admirers, he was more impressed than most of his colleagues.

Sargeant began his analysis of Callas' performance by examining, in a general fashion, the singer's physical presence on the stage. He commented on her striking appearance and cited evidence of the "intense temperament of a born tragedienne." Summing up her power and potential as an actress he said,

*Her talents as an actress, I suspect are limited to the more fiery range of Latin operatic tragedy but within that range they are extraordinarily elastic and have the power to draw an audience into the life and emotions of the character she is portraying—a power that is not very common among singers when one approaches them from the purely visual standpoint.*

Next Sargeant discussed the general quality of Callas' voice and her singing technique, carefully listing her vocal strengths and weaknesses. He concluded, however, on a positive note. "*...It is capable of the utmost flexibility, throughout this compass, and its flexibility, coupled with its range and not unrespectable power, gives her the combined virtues of a dramatic and coloratura soprano, a coincidence of vocal gifts that is at
least rare and therefore quite impressive." Sargeant then focused his attention on the specific situation, Callas as Norma at the Metropolitan on the occasion of her debut. At this point in his analysis Callas' singing became the primary consideration. He described the opera's exacting challenge, both in point of technique and in point of style and complimented Callas on her rendition of Norma's famous first aria. "She spun out the long, extremely taxing phrases of "Casta Diva" reticently but with superb control and with admirable refinement where niceties of accent and emphasis were concerned." About the rest of the opera he was equally satisfied. "She went on to tackle the formidable coloratura hurdles of the role with practiced precisions, singing nearly everything in tune (a feat noteworthy in itself) and giving each passage an appropriate elegance of style." In closing, commenting on the often mentioned "calculation" of the performance Sargeant remarked,

I can imagine more effortless Normas (Miss Callas seemed desperately anxious the other night to get everything just right, and I was sometimes constrained to admire her zeal, rather than to relax in simple enjoyment, as I should have preferred to do) but this was an astonishingly neat and well handled one and I can now look forward with pleasure to what Miss Callas will do with such roles as Tosca and Lucia, which from the purely vocal point of view, are a great deal less demanding.  

Sargeant was thorough in his treatment of every aspect of the performance except Callas' histrionic abilities. It is curious that a critic so patently conscientious and methodical as Sargeant seemed unable in this instance to discuss the "acting" of the role in any detail. His comments pertaining to the details of a performance by a renowned singing stresses dealt entirely with her singing. Perhaps Callas' obvious close attention to her singing on the occasion of her debut invited such an approach to some degree. Whatever the reason, Sargeant's treatment of the
performance reinforces the idea that on the operatic stage an ability to project a strong, if generalized physical picture of a character was considered by most critics to be tantamount to good acting. Even Callas' much commented upon concern for appropriate dramatic and musical detail was at times partially ignored by musically schooled reviewers who ultimately had difficulty analysing the mechanics of dramatic finesse on the opera stage no matter how conscientiously they tried. A lack of theatrical insight was the only flaw in Sargeant's otherwise exemplary review.

Firmly entrenched on either side of the New Yorker critics sensible, balanced criticism of the Callas debut were the violently partisan evaluations of B. H. Haggin in Nation and Irving Kolodin in Saturday Review. Predictably Haggin hated Callas. Strangely enough, however, he chose to take umbrage at her acting technique and was somewhat appeased by her musical and vocal finesse. Of her voice he wrote that she had been,

...Exhibiting a voice that has lost most of what caused so much to be written about her....By now its original bloom and loveliness are gone....It has a bad wobble and as often as not it produces a climatic high note off-pitch....But in an occasional quiet phrase employing its lower range the voice approximated its former beauty.

Obviously, Haggin had been impressed by the recordings that had preceded Callas' appearance on the Metropolitan stage, and even in her vocally debilitated state he praised her musicianship almost unconditionally. "All the singing whether agreeable or not in quality of sound, still exhibited Callas' unfailing sense and concern for musical phrase, which at times was very exciting." However, he was highly offended by the soprano's histrionics.

In the Metropolitan her singing did not project that compelling power that it does at microphone range on records. Nor did she, on the stage, radiate any of the force of personal presence or dramatic projection
that her carefully studied poses and movements were evidently meant to convey. They were meant also to make the performance a prima-donna assoluta grand style operations, and in this too they failed.

Haggin seemed to imply that Callas' voice did not have sufficient dramatic weight to successfully carry what he considered to be the excess baggage of her grand-eloquent acting style. The Nation critic seemed to regard any attempt at visual interest on stage to be merely a setting for the voice, he apparently felt that Miss Callas was forcing a gilt, baroque frame around a watercolor. Haggin was even more incensed by the reaction that her, in his opinion, empty pyrotechnics elicited. "All this [Callas' acting] was bad enough, but what was appalling was the audience's response to it; the same storms of applause, the same cheers and yells as for the successful operation of a Melba, a Lehman, a Flagstad." One wonders if Haggin's summation of Callas was an entirely objective process or whether he allowed the audience's obvious disagreement with his own evaluation to pique him into even more strongly negative commentary. He summed up his feelings about the performance with a pedantic lecture on the general decline of quality on the opera stage and ended his review with the following declaration of longing for the "good old days." "We have, then not only a deterioration in performance, but a deterioration in public taste that is to some extent responsible for it."11

Before leaving the apoplectic Mr. Haggin it should be noted that his book Music Observed published in 1964 includes the following commentary on Callas' much publicized dismissal from the Met by its headstrong manager Rudolf Bing:

Callas' vocal powers, peculiarities and deficiencies—not only her range, agility and power, and the strangely beautiful timber of her lower voice, but even her unpleasantly shrill high notes—promised an effective Lady Macbeth two seasons later, but was lost through
Mr. Bing's loudly proclaimed dismissal of her, allegedly for reasons which did not justify his action.12

Haggin's reservations about Callas' abilities were still in evidence, but his estimation of her value as an artist had altered considerably in eight years. His change of opinion was made even more apparent in the same book when Haggin compared Joan Sutherland's coloratura accomplishments to those of the pioneerring Callas. Although he mentioned certain improvements in Sutherland's singing, in the final analysis she fell short of his description of the young Callas.

A few years ago Maria Callas created new interest in the operas of Bellina and Donezetti with her singing of their difficult vocal parts—the delivery of melody that was made affecting by the strangely beautiful color of her lower notes, musically distinguished by her sense for continuity and shape of phrase made eloquent by her powers of dramatic expressiveness; the execution of florid passages that was made spectacular by her vocal agility, accuracy and range and her bravura style.13

These examples from Haggins reviews over the years suggest that history and perhaps public opinion may gradually change the opinion of even the most adamant critics.

In contrast to Haggin, Irving Kolodin representing the favourable side of the Callas debate had not one negative word to say about the debut performance. The prefacing remarks of his review made it clear that his opinion of Miss Callas had been fixed prior to her Met debut and that his chief interest in observing this particular rendition of Norma was,

...A basic curiosity about the marriage of the voice and the house; would they be compatible or would there be need for a period of trial wedding?

A dress rehearsal on the Saturday before left no doubt in this respect; the voice, though not a huge or weighty one, is so well-supported and floated that it is audible at all times, most particularly in the piano and pianissimo effects which Miss Callas delights in giving us.

Kolodin's opening comments may seem effusive, but they served to make his
biases perfectly apparent. His discussion of Callas was confined to a
detailed and complimentary analysis, some might claim justification, of
her vocal and musical technique in general and of her portrayal of the
Druid High Priestess in particular.

It [Callas' voice] is what every great artist's means of
communication becomes: an extension of her own person-
ality. That personality is dynamic, highly charged,
tigerish and constantly under discipline. So too, the
voice is dynamically dramatic, produced as though it
might be torn from the singer's insides, and presided
over with an almost visible concern for every work and
note she sings. Nothing is thoughtless, left to chance,
or without total purpose.

Callas' careful, intellectual approach to singing, not as apparent at
her fiery best, but artificial-seeming to detractors like Haggin when
passion did not light a performance, held an appeal for Kolodin. He
delighted at the sense of conscientious effort that Callas brought to
her work and he compared her vocal equipment to a clarinet which "She
worked on [it] like a woodwind player fingering invisible keys." The com­
posure which others felt stultifying, he found "impressive"; and, al­
though he conceded that "Casta Diva" began with noticeable vocal tension,
he found that, "The artistic purpose was deeper, even more communicative
than in Chicago two years ago." In this last opinion he stood alone
amongst the major critics.

Though he praised her performance generally, Kolodin did not specifi­
cally mention of Callas' acting abilities in this review. He consistently
referred to the soprano as a singer or an artist. In his summation of her
Norma he said of the performance,

She was creating a character as emphatically her own as
Flagstad's Alceste, or Lehmann's Marschallin, or in an­
other dimension Markova's Giselle. It was something
seen whole and consecutive from beginning to end. Re­
served in its early aspects, infuriated in those that
followed, and finally resigned to the self sacrifice she
Kolodin was evidently aware of the dramatic power of Miss Callas' performance, but he assumed the center of dramatic truth and effectiveness to lie within the voice. Logically we could construe that he therefore, did not care about the histrionic aspects of the operatic art. However, such a proposition is difficult to believe about an enthusiastic supporter of a performer universally acknowledged to be a striking actress. It is more likely that Kolodin believed that opera demanded a particular talent which is of its nature a homogenized blend of vocal, physical and psychological abilities which could not meaningfully be looked at as separate ingredients. Kolodin seems to have united these lesser talents under the umbrella term "vocal and musical technique", in an attempt to convey his philosophy that the technique of operatic performance is an indivisible totality.

A Comparison of Critical Techniques

It should not be forgotten, however, that Kolodin's analysis of Tebaldi's Desdemona seemed less concerned with communicating the importance of unity in operatic performance. He had found that her "iron-willed composure" interfered with the "dramatic impact of stage ambiance and immediate audience appeal". Though he described Tebaldi as "a big, handsome woman of gracious presence and easy movement," he had found fault with her apparent choice of "beautiful sound as more important than the incisive meaning"; and he had concluded with the hope that "her Desdemona, model of vocal art that it was, is but the beginning of her success as a dramatic artist." Perhaps because Tebaldi was weak in the dramatic
interpretation of her role, Kolodin felt constrained to examine each element of her performance individually rather than treat her interpretation as an integrated totality. Although Kolodin had implied a separation of abilities in his analysis of Tebaldi's Desdemona, he still referred to the singer's dramatic deficiencies from a vocal point of view and never discussed her "acting" as such.

In contrast to Kolodin, Sargeant was more consistent in his treatment of the two singers. His review of Callas' performance was more complete. However, his treatment of each soprano opened with a description of the circumstances surrounding the performance and continued with a methodical analysis of the various facets of her art. Sargeant reported each woman's general appearance and general vocal quality. He went on to examine the manner in which each soprano adapted her musicianship to the specific role. Finally, he compared the performances under review to performances of the past which he considered to be examples of the highest excellence. (Sargeant considered Rosa Ponselle as Norma and Elizabeth Rethburg as Desdemona to be the nearest to perfect interpreters of these characters.) By naming particular performances as examples of his personal ideal, the reader was given something definite to agree or disagree with and, thus, had a thumb to hold up to the review as a whole.

The combined reviewing techniques of opening a review with a description of the atmosphere and circumstances surrounding a performance and closing it with a precise yardstick by which to measure its quality provided a clear context for Sargeant's evaluations. Moreover, Sargeant reported the reactions to the performance of both the general audience and the critics; he provided an analysis of these reactions; and he offered a comparison of his own reaction to that of the other spectators. In other words, Sargeant presented his reader with maximum data by which to
evaluate his own evaluations.

Follow-up Performances

In order to give this chapter a larger perspective, a look must be taken at two of the follow-up performances to Tebaldi's and Callas' eagerly awaited but, on the whole, disappointing Metropolitan debuts. Olin Downes, so cautious in his first review of Tebaldi's Desdemona, had been completely won over by her Mimi in Puccini's La Bohème. He called Tebaldi's portrayal of the romantic young seamstress "a revelation", adding, "We have heard no Mimi who moved us so much by the sincerity and the gripping emotion that she gave the part." Downes' Bohème review demonstrated a peculiar thought process. The critic seems to have been attempting to re-orient himself in the face of shattered preconceptions. He expected a display of "impeccable singing" and was presented instead with technique which reflected a "grand and warm and dramatic Italian temperament" and a voice that "throbbed with feeling". Having once been won over by the emotional effectiveness of the singer, Downes seemed hard pressed to fit the physical characterization of the performer to the theatrical exigencies of the role. He described the discrepancy in the following coy fashion:

One could even say that Miss Tebaldi whose height is something that can easily be embarrassing to her partners on the stage, and whose stature gives her a more imposing effect than one naturally associates with the figure of the little seamstress Mimi, makes the character in a manner proportionate to her height and a greater and more dramatic figure than one imagines the girl of Puccini and Murger to be.

Downes tried somewhat awkwardly to justify the mismatch between Tebaldi's substantial physique and Mimi's consumptive one by glorifying the discrepancy.
We would rather have experienced the thrills and known the tragic overtones of this impersonation than the most perfect and finished representation on a smaller scale. If it is a hitherto unknown variation of the character, even if it is not sung irreproachably in every tone, note and phrase— it does not matter. It is a creative communication, and it makes us feel Mimi as an intensely living, loving and suffering human being, and not merely a pathetic figure of Bohemian life in Paris of a century ago.

In other words, the emphatic quality of Tebaldi's singing was of greater importance than the precise human insights suggested by the libretto. In fact, Downes went so far as to intimate that the story is not worth adhering to. "Communication" is the key word in Downes' evaluation of Tebaldi's art, but the question must be asked—communication of what? Each of the performing arts amalgamates the efforts of the composer, librettist, playwright, director, choreographer, conductor, designer, character, performer, etc., and it is the interaction of these several personalities that lend the performing arts their rich texture. Can the highest artistic purpose of opera served when the singer's personality overpowers all others and becomes an end in itself? It does not seem likely.

Whereas Tebaldi appeared to relax quickly into the Metropolitan routine, Callas' cautious and restrained approach to her art persisted throughout her first weeks in New York. Theater Arts reported that,

Not until she tackled Tosca did the legendary Callas become a living presence on the stage of the Metropolitan, exercising the generative forces which are peculiarly hers. With Callas it is the total effect that counts. Her singing, at least throughout the first Tosca, was decidedly spotty; her acting taken by itself, often mannered. Yet in the second act of Tosca she showed the Metropolitan what much of the rest of the world has been shouting about—a prima donna charged with pulsating excitement.

Unfortunately, Tosca, as the third of Callas' roles that season was not reviewed by any of the major critics. Kolodin and Sargeant, however, did take a second look at the controversial soprano in her first performance of Donizetti's Lucia Di Lammermoor. The reviews reveal little
further about the singer but confirm some of the characteristics of the two critics. Judging from the *Theater Arts* comments ("Curiously this automation-like approach—never apparent during her triumph in Chicago—persisted throughout her first two weeks at the Met!") and from Sargent's evaluation that her Lucia was less impressive than her Norma (mainly because of several tense and a few botched high notes), Callas' in her second torturous coloratura role maintained the same air of cautious self-control though with even less success than she had achieved as Norma. Kolodin, however, continued to be ecstatic, making a favourable comparison between Callas' interpretation and the "freight of wooden gestures, loose limbs, and barren leaves of pathos" which, in his estimation, usually accompanied the role. Deviating from his customary treatment of Callas, he singled out several examples of her taste and finesse as an actress.

She dressed the part as a mistress of a castle might, with taste and style, and provided an economical action for the Mad Scene that made it a scene as well as mad....Here instead of indulging in useless wanderings about the stage with the surface suggestions of dementia, Miss Callas concentrated on interpreting the words with a simplicity and power that absorbed the attention of a capacity audience.

Kolodin also praised the subtlety of her musical interpretation.

Knowing her voice as well as she knows her business—which is to say, thoroughly—Miss Callas doubtless realizes that she cannot charm the listener by vibrance or prettiness alone, hence the greater concentration on verbal intensities, warm turns of phrase and a dynamic reserve that produces an occasional, well-planned high spot.

While Kolodin did not overlook Callas' questionable high notes, he showed them in a light which rendered them drastically, if not musically acceptable. He described her two uncertain top "D's as "exclamation points rather than periods." Kolodin plainly found the Callas' style of well-planned and often effective artifice inspirational. Consequently, flaws
in her performance technique were for him overshadowed by the excellence of her basic method and her high artistic purpose. "Lucia at the Metropolitan will be something different for some time to come, now that Maria Callas has shown she can be a person of dramatic credibility as well as musical incredibility."19

In contrast to Kolodin's claim that Callas' Lucia was an innovation, Winthrop Sargeant found little new in the performance. He, therefore, used his review to editorialize further on the emotional frenzy which often underlies operatic performances, but which Miss Callas' presence seemed greatly to exasperate.

Opera may be a branch of music and a variety of drama, but it is also—at least in its effect upon many of its devotees—a kind of sport, and those who regard it as such have been exceptionally conspicuous at the Metropolitan Opera House over the past month or so. During this time I have encountered more symptoms of combative emotion—cheers, boos, hisses, arguments, standees clutching their temples, wringing their hands in the lobby between acts, even minor scuffles—than had previously come to my attention in years. Miss Maria Callas, [is] a rather remarkable singer with, I understand, a highly competitive approach to her work...As far as I can make out the rumpus stems mainly from the fact that Miss Callas' admirers have claimed for her unique rank as a sort of world's champion soprano and her detractors don't think she deserves the title. I don't either, but I must say that to my knowledge she has broken two records this season,...She sang a fairly accurate Norma, a Tosca and a Lucia within a two week period, something that might be compared to successive demonstrations of prowess at weight-lifting and the hundred-yard dash.20

The preceding excerpt demonstrates once again that an important reviewing concept for the New Yorker critic was to provide his reader with a context for each performance. Furthermore, Sargeant clearly stated his final estimation of Callas' voice as merely a personal predilection. "Despite these accomplishments, though, one is not obliged to like Miss Callas' singing. I find the quality of her voice somewhat monotonous and at times disagreeably feline."
Related to his concern for context is also Sargeant's welcome injection of humour into art form which often sadly lacks it on the stage and off. A sense of humour often goes hand in hand with a sense of perspective and one is grateful for Sargeant's efforts to maintain both. In his final summation of the performance, Sargeant tied his review together neatly by referring back in all seriousness to his whimsical opening metaphor.

Except for these faulty notes, however, I found her interpretation of the role interesting and occasionally even thrilling. Her coloratura was extraordinarily agile and expressive, and her handling of accent and phrasing was always scrupulous, elegant and authoritative. Miss Callas's summation, again showed herself to be a remarkable singer but she also showed that her striking physical resources have their limits.  

Callas—An Historical Perspective

In concluding our study of critical reactions to Tebaldi's and Callas' debut performances in America's most prestigious opera house, the following quotation may give us a better perspective on the sagacity of the reviewer's opinions. Ten years after her Metropolitan debut, Henry Peasants in The Great Singers—from the Dawn of Opera to Our Own Time compared Callas to the great and controversial soprano Guiditta Pasta:

These roles [Anna Bolena, Somnanbula, Norma] along with the Medea noted previously will remind the contemporary reader of Maria Callas, although Callas' Medea was Cherubinis rather than Mayer's. And, indeed these two singers have had more in common than mere affinity to roles. In Callas was repeated Pasta's imperfect and unruly voice tamed, more or less, by severe discipline and training and resourcefully managed. Both could sing badly later in their careers and at the same time excite enthusiasm and even ecstasy. Common to both has been the achievement of prevailing over more beautiful and more tractable voices. Pasta and Callas have had the glamour, or genius as Chorley would have called it, by which the great artists, as distinguished form the merely good, cast a spell that deafens the listener.
to executive imperfections and inadequacies. They have been more than singers, rather tragediennes in the grand manner, big actresses and big, commanding persuasive personalities.²²

If Peasants' historically distanced overview can be taken as an accurate evaluation of Callas' art, we may then conclude that Irving Kolodin for all his effusion was, perhaps the most perceptive and prophetic of his journalistic peers.


19. Ibid.


21. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV-TOSCA

The role of Floria Tosca, tempestuous heroine of Puccini's blood-and-thunder opera, is splendidly suited to almost any dramatic soprano because it provides her with an unique opportunity to portray herself on stage, yet remain credible within the context of the plot. Callas and Tebaldi were each sufficiently vivid personalities to fill the role of the nineteenth century prima donna with ease. Both sopranos performed Tosca regularly throughout their careers.

Although their recorded repertoires overlapped considerably (as we will see in the concluding chapter), offering opportunities for direct comparison, the mainstreams of Tebaldi's and Callas' stage work merged only occasionally. Whereas Tebaldi sang in the conventional spinto soprano repertoire throughout her career, Callas began as a dramatic soprano, extended her range to encompass coloratura roles, then retreated into spinto and mezzo soprano selections as her vocal powers faded. In the two preceeding chapters we have used similar events in the careers of the two singers as the bases for comparing New York critics' responses to acting in opera. In this chapter, we will use the one role which was common to the stage repertoires of both Tebaldi and Callas, Floria Tosca, as the basis for analyzing the critical standards and methods of opera reviewers.

The lush and grandiose melodic lines so characteristic of Puccini made Tosca an ideal vehicle for Tebaldi's luxurious and sometimes unwieldy vocal equipment. On the other hand, the quicksilver moods of the heroine and the grand guignol events of the plot were well suited to
both the finesse and the power of Callas's histrionic virtuosity. The role was important to the careers of both sopranos and reviews of their noteworthy performances have created many opportunities for comparison between the singers and among the critics. Because several productions and a considerable span of years are represented in this chapter, the reviews also afford us several opportunities to compare the critic to himself.

Tebaldi's First American Tosca

Tebaldi was the first of the two sopranos to appear as Tosca in the United States. Her first major performance of the role came during her debut season with the Metropolitan. When initially confronted with her interpretation of the character, Kolodin and Sargeant each recorded mixed emotions. Sargeant's summation was luke-warm.

Renata Tebaldi sang her first Tosca at the Metropolitan on Tuesday evening, and, suspecting that it might turn out to be her most effective role so far, I went to hear it. The performance, given for the benefit of the Free Milk Fund, was held to a rigorously uninspired level by Fausto Cleva, who conducted it. Miss Tebaldi, however, sang with commendable warmth and enthusiasm, and succeeded in stopping the show with her "Vissi D'arte". I do not think she is a consummate mistress of the more refined aspects of bel canto, nor can I place her among the greatest Toscas I have ever heard. But she looked the part, and, contributed to an air of physical vitality that I found pleasing.

Although Sargeant was not entirely captivated by Tebaldi's performance, we see in his review the familiar tendency of most opera critics to approve vaguely appropriate generality as sufficient foundation for an acceptable, even praiseworthy characterization. It may be of significance to note that he went to "hear" the performance rather than to "see" it.

Kolodin was somewhat more favourable in his evaluation of Tebaldi's first New York Tosca; however, he too, had had reservations about her
For awhile during the Metropolitan performance of *Tosca*, which introduced Renata Tebaldi's conception of the title part to that house, it seemed that her graph of accomplishments was destined for a downward dip. Her first act was not particularly well sung, she was unbecomingly costumed, and the light touch required for the coquetry with Cavadarossi was mostly absent. However, a Tosca stands or falls on what she offers in Act II, and Tebaldi here magnetized attention with her well-planned loathing of Scarpia; and her equally determined dispatch of him once her plan of accomplishment was clear. Meanwhile, she allied vocal vigor to the whole, delivering "Vissi d'arte" in a manner to justify what it used to be called—a prayer to the Virgin.

There is the suggestion in this excerpt that Kolodin's visual taste was at odds with Sargeant's. Whereas Kolodin found fault with Tebaldi's costuming, his colleague found her physical appearance suitable to the role. Kolodin also discerned in her first act performance somewhat less than Sargeant generally conceded to her; but he placed greater value on the thrust of the second act in which he felt there to be evidence of considerable dramatic awareness on the part of the soprano. Although specific opinions about specific points vary appreciably, the points brought up for evaluation were similar in Kolodin's and Sargeant's critiques. Taken as a whole, these two reviews came to comparable conclusions with regard to the standard of the performance.

Second Season

Tebaldi fared better with both the role and the critics in a revised production of the opera during her second Metropolitan season.

Howard Taubman called the newly polished production "stunning."

The impediments of routine were cast aside and the work was restudied under the direction of Dmitri Mitropoulos as though it were a new opera. The result was a performance with the explosive power of melodrama at its best. It was precisely because Puccini's music was given its due that this production carried such impact.... Renata Tebaldi was a Tosca in whom you could believe.
She carried herself like the prima donna Tosca is and at the same time she had the simplicity and tenderness which most interpreters forget to convey. Her singing was nothing less than masterly commanding in its power and searching in its sensitivity. And at the end of the second act she knew how to muster the fury and the horror of the shocked avenger.

The soprano's stage presence and emotional capacities seemed to have improved enormously with the relative relaxation of a second season and Mitropoulos' guidance.

Interestingly enough, Winthrop Sargeant, on hand for the December debut of the new production, completely revised his initial evaluation of Tebaldi's Tosca. "Tosca to a T," was the title of his review in which he gave everyone involved in the production and especially Renata Tebaldi high praise. In his conscientious style, Sargeant offered an analysis of the opera which focused particular attention on the character of the heroine.

...While Tosca, the opera, is mostly blood and thunder, Tosca, the character, has a certain authentic grandeur, and in some ways constitutes more than what is ordinarily thought of as an operatic role. One can say that it is sung or acted well or badly and still miss the real point, because singing and acting are only part of what a great diva brings to a great Tosca. Above all Tosca is a personality—an extremely dominating and affecting one—and the finest interpreters of the role have always had the peculiar faculty of convincing you, at the moment, that they were the passionate woman they depict, a faculty that may or may not be directly related to such things as vocal beauty and histrionic elegance.

Sargeant went on to mention briefly several great Toscas of the past and one of the great failures. Of Tebaldi he confessed that he had initially formed an unfavourable impression.

Her first act, in fact, struck me as rather tepid and cursory. I must say, however, that by the end of the second act I was in a mood to shout approval, as those about me were doing. Miss Tebaldi had succeeded in seizing the stage with the flamboyant and uninhibited fervor that a fine Tosca must have; she looked very handsome, and she sang with enormous
conviction. It was obvious to me at this point that the ups and downs of operatic history and again presented us with a major figure capable of giving the role its due.

Although the cast in general was much commended for its performance, Sargeant gave the lion's share of his musical and dramatic praise to Dmitri Metropoulos, "a conductor of notable energy", who managed to lend fervor to "the notably energetic opera". The orchestra played for him as if its life was at stake, and, apart from a few lapses..., the result was nothing short of brilliant. "In summing up the production, Sargeant chose the same word as Taubman, "stunning".4

There are two points of particular interest in Sargeant's review. The first is his insightful analysis of the way in which Tosca "works" as a character. The role requires a singer who can throw her own personality recklessly into her characterization. "Reserve", a quality often so painfully lacking in opera singers' attempts at acting, is entirely out of place in this role. Tosca legitimizes some of the melodramatic antics which too often masquerade as "acting" on the operatic stage. The second point of interest is Sargeant's suggestion that sheer energy and a sense of conviction in performance can contribute tremendously to the success of any opera and this opera in particular.

The New Yorker critic, as a rule musically fastidious, allowed himself to be swept along by the vigorous musical and dramatic drive of the renovated Tosca. Like Taubman he felt that the success of this production was due primarily to Mitropoulos' "frenzied enthusiasm" as the conductor.

Comparing Sargeant with himself nine months earlier one is confronted by his complete reversal of opinion with regard to Tebaldi's merits as a performer and especially as an interpreter of Tosca. In March she had been dismissed with a devastating understatement, "I do
not think she is a consummate mistress of the more refined aspects of bel canto, nor can I place her among the greatest Toscas I have ever heard.\textsuperscript{5} However, in December Sargeant declared, "It was obvious to me at this point that the ups and downs of operatic history had again presented us with a major figure capable of giving the role its due."

Tebaldi plainly owed much of the credit for her new status as one of the great Toscas to Mitropoulos' guidance, and one suspects that Sargeant's elevated estimation of her portrayal was influenced by the overall improvement in quality of the production. Curiously enough, despite the widely differing conclusions drawn, Sargeant described the two performances in almost identical terms. In March Tebaldi "sang with commendable warmth and enthusiasm"; looked the part and contributed (to) an air of physical vitality"; but Sargeant found the performance lacking in finesse. In December she "succeeded in seizing the stage with the flamboyant and uninhibited fervor that a fine Tosca must have; she looked very handsome and she sang with enormous conviction"; and Sargeant found the performance near perfection. The main difference between the two performances seems to have been that in the second Tebaldi simply repeated what she had done in the first but with greater zeal.

Uncharacteristically, Sargeant did not mention any specific musical or vocal considerations in his December review of Tebaldi's Tosca. Moreover, the very qualities which in his earlier review he condemned as musically and vocally crude, he praised less than a year later as dramatically and theatrically effective. It is somewhat surprising and disappointing that Sargeant did not refer to his earlier review and elaborate on his change of heart (as we have previously seen him do with regard to Miss Callas).
Callas' Early Toscas

We turn now to Maria Callas' long association with the role of Floria Tosca. To begin with her recorded version of *Tosca* was one of the phenomena which excited interest in North America before her U.S. debut in Chicago in 1954. Ronald Eyer made the following comments with regard to the release of the official La Scala recording:

A dramatically vivid and stirring account of Puccini's *Tosca* is given by La Scala forces under the baton of Victor de Sabata...The live and vibrant atmosphere of the theatre is preserved (whether or not the taping actually was done in La Scala), and the momentum of the drama builds continuously to the stunning climax of the very last note in a manner seldom surpassed in an actual performance. The title role is essayed with great vocal and dramatic effectiveness by Maria Meneghini Callas. Giuseppe Di Stefano, already known in America, is more impressive than I ever have heard him as Cavaradossi, and Tito Gobbi makes chilling reality of the dark character of Scarpia.

Ensemble performing and dramatic impact were the key notes of Eyer's review. Though he emphasized the dramatic effectiveness of the recording, Eyer gave no indication that Callas or any of the singers delivered less than satisfactory musical and vocal performances.

When Callas made her Metropolitan debut in 1956, she was entering the second phase of her remarkable association with *Tosca*. The role was the most conventional of the three which she performed that season. Consequently, it represented even for critics interested enough to review the production, only a minor event in Callas' remarkable vocal decathlon. The *New York Times* critique opened with renewed praise for the unflagging orchestral vitality inspired by Dimitri Metropoulos and continued with words of highest admiration for Callas. "Last Night an already strong production took on still further intensity through the presence of a Tosca who, dramatically, was about as perfectly conceived as one could imagine."

What followed in the review was a graphic account of Callas' detailed
interpretation of the part.

...One of the original features of her performance last night was that she made Tosca so young. In her conception of the part—and in this she was true to the libretto—Tosca was a rather simple peasant girl, who because of her singing career had learned the airs of a great lady, but who in moments of crisis reverted to country naturalness and spontaneity.

Thus, when she relented with Mario in the first act, after he had convinced her she had no cause to be jealous, she was all charming tenderness, with just a hint of the sensuality that is part of her make-up. When she cursed the Scarpia she had stabbed, she spoke as a woman might in a market. And when she went, as she thought, to rescue Mario in the final act, she was an excited girl.

Playing Tosca thus, all the contradictions disappeared. There was no inconsistency in the women cursing at the portrait of a rival and then sweeping off grandly. Her foolishness in betraying Mario's secret was understandable, and she made the famous aria "Vissi d'arte" make perfect sense. Obviously she was a pious girl, who, in view of her devotion to the Madonna, felt it utterly incomprehensible that her world should suddenly come crashing to pieces.

However, the Times accorded her singing somewhat less enthusiasm.

Often she was fine, especially in the deeper notes, and when the long phrases were spun out softly. But in high notes, when she sang loudly, her voice took on an edge, and in a few of the topmost forte notes one suspected she was still suffering from the throat ailment announced at her second Norma. Still, the audience did not seem to mind. It cheered her repeatedly.

The tone of these last two sentences is ambiguous. Did the critic mean to signify that the performance must have been of fine quality because the audience approved of it? Or was he making a deadpan comment on the accountability of audience taste? It is difficult to tell.

Oddly enough, though Callas had made the official La Scala recording of Tosca, she had never actually performed the role at the renowned Italian opera house. Florida Tosca was a character well suited to her talent, but Callas was nevertheless, relatively new to the role. Vocally, Tosca should have been easy in comparison with either the Norma or Donizetti's Lucia Di Lammermoor both of which she had sung creditably
within the week. However her familiarity with the role in addition to the fact that she had sung the taxing and radically different role of Norma only a few days previously probably contributed to her vocal problems during the performance.

Irving Kolodin, whose admiration for Callas had been growing stronger with each of her performances took the extenuating circumstances into account and designated the performance "first-class". His review opened with an implied comparison between Callas and Renata Tebaldi, who had made Tosca her own in the previous two Metropolitan seasons.

There may be sound basis for arguing which singer, of all contemporaries, is the most voluptuous sounding Tosca, the most ample in vocal volume, the most unwilling partner to Scarpia's intentions, but Callas strikes me as the most credible Tosca of our time. She sings her music with the instincts of a fine musician. Slight in appearance but commanding in manner, she was believable from first by play with Cavaradossi, responsively jealous to Scarpia's trickery, and an avenging fury in the moment most foreign to Tosca's true nature, when a knife becomes the key to her dilemma.

As has been pointed out in previous chapters, Kolodin seldom mentioned "acting" as such in his reviews of Maria Callas. In his Tosca review, however, he seems to have been making an attempt to suggest the interdependence of singing and acting in opera by alternating musical and dramatic terms and examples. The resulting mixture of descriptive phrases strongly suggested the homogeneity of the Callas art. Kolodin's Tosca review continued as a pastiche of musical and dramatic examples of the soprano's skills.

Even for those whose knowledge of the Italian text derives from the printed page rather than a close familiarity with the language, it was clear that Callas was merging word with note in a way that might cost her something in purity of sound but made an explosive totality. The dialogue was delivered as dialogue (Callas is the rare performer who works to her dramatic vis−à−vis rather than to the audience), but when she came to "Vissi d'arte" there were full resources
of vocal color and eloquence to give it sure effect. Notable too, were the variations of movement to suit the situation—the quick eager steps when she was looking for Cavaradossi in Act I, the complete bodily dejection when she was at Scarpia's untender mercy in Act II and knew it, the upsurge of spirit when she came upon the weapon. Of note, too, the plan of gesture was of another sort than in her Norma; the strong design for the part still allowed for improvisation in the heat of performance.

Recognizing the basic sound for what it is—whitish and variable—there were few notes not securely in place, cleanly, clearly articulated with her own kind of bland coloration, which is not to everybody's taste but should be to anybody's comprehension....For those with an eye as well as an ear for their Toscas, Callas carried the long-skirted-blue-on-blue gown of Act I with an air, and was appropriately regal in black-with-brilliants in Act II.

While his review was not without criticism of the performance, Kolodin's points of contention were minor. In basic concordance with his colleagues he praised Mitropoulos for his "strong leadership" which had made this performance "a Tosca of vigour and intensity".

Tosca had not been Callas most winning achievement in her two years fliration with the city of New York. In her first season she had dazzled her audience with Norma and Lucia, and in her second season she had convinced the critics and the public alike of her right to the appellation "La Divina" with her portrayal of Violetta in Verdi's La Traviata. However, even from its modest place in her repertoire, Tosca had created enough enthusiasm to provoke the following scene in March 1958 sardonically reported in the New Yorker's "Talk of the Town":

Maria Menaghini Callas' last appearance of the season at the Metropolitan occasioned affirmative and negative audience noises that went on long after the diva, as Tosca made an accomplished leap from the battlements of the Castel Sant'Angelo, to land we hope, on a feather bed or a stagehand. It was the kind of row usually associated with an umpires close decision on a base runner...When they (the gallery booers) shut up, everybody went home, after a final and confused "Bravo!"

We came away happy and bruised, our musical education complete.

Tosca was the last role Callas performed at the Met before her notorious feud
with Rudolf Bing silenced her singing there for seven years. The scene described above proved to be prophetic. Callas' reappearance in the role seven years later was to be an equally emotional affair, but the entire audience would then be clearly in the palm of her hand.

Homecoming—Tebaldi and Tosca in 1958

Meanwhile, Renata Tebaldi's position as the outstanding interpreter of contemporary Toscas had been challenged. Her 1957–58 season's engagements had been cancelled due to the death of her mother. When in the fall of 1958 she returned in the Puccini opera to open the Metropolitan's 74th Diamond Jubilee Season, her mastery of the character had slipped. Howard Taubman treated her more generously than most critics in his review in the *Times* the following morning. He described the excitement of opening night with approbation and affection. "Even at the inflated prices that the Met can command for its opening night, the audience gets a rousing run for its money." For those memories had grown dim during her year's absence from the public eye he reiterated the excellences of Tebaldi's vocal equipment. "Miss Tebaldi returned in fine fettle. Her voice remains one of the most exceptional instruments of our day. It has remarkable range from the rich chest tones to the filigree pianissimos, opulence of color and abounding reserve power." However, her singing on this occasion caused his exuberance to flag somewhat. "She sang with control and an effort at refinement. There were places where she poured out an excess of big ones..." In the end he warmly commended her but with one abrupt reservation. "...Her "Vissi d'arte" had taste and touching simplicity. Her performance, as a whole, was in the grand tradition—at least vocally."
Even Mitropoulos, whose conducting had been highly praised in previous seasons, received less approbation from Taubman. "Dmitri Mitropoulos conducted with the blazing temperament Tosca can support. There were a few moments when he let the orchestra overwhelm the principals. Fortunately, he had the singers who could ride out some temporary storms." Taubman's new reservations about the conductor were even more marked than those about Tebaldi.

The only artist in this gala performance to provoke Taubman's disapproval was Mario Del Monaco. Because the tenor attracted similar criticism from many critics, Taubman's strongest objection is here examined as an indication of what critics regarded as a truly reprehensible performance. The Times reviewer faulted Del Monaco for failing to conform to the stylistic requirements of Puccini's lyricism. "...He [Del Monaco] insists on blasting away..." Although Taubman clearly disapproved the tenor's vulgarity, his next statement seemingly justified the gaucherie. "On the other hand, you have to admit that the audience loved those trumpet-like tones." This dry comment was obviously meant to be an ironic comment on audience taste. However, it was so understated a criticism that it probably escaped the notice of the very persons to which it was addressed. The 1958 Tosca was an overblown production verging on crudity; however, the Times critic, while not wildly enthusiastic, was not on the whole disapproving.

On the other hand, Ronald Eyre, who normally wrote bland and politely gracious reviews more in the vein of publicity releases than of serious criticism, was nudged into a surprisingly gloomy corner by the "outsize" performance which marked Tebaldi's homecoming.
From Scarpia's three great crashing chords in the introduction, which Dimitri Mitropoulos fetches down like the crack of doom, the opera proceeded like a kind of gladiatorial contest at which the spectators cheered on their favourites, and the climatic death of the fascistic Baron fizzled like a damp firecracker amid the vocal bombs hurtling fore and aft.

Tebaldi was doled out her individual share of criticism, although it was criticism tempered by Eyer's general regard for her talent. It is interesting to notice, however, that Eyer indicated an ambivalence of mind not only with respect to this particularly flamboyant performance, but also with respect to Tebaldi's interpretation of Tosca in general.

Renata Tebaldi's image of the storied Tosca is, for some of us, an equivocal affair. First and foremost, we realized that we were hearing a Tosca with few peers in beauty of vocal delivery and abundance of golden tone. The voice is one of the great organs of our time, and it could not be more aptly employed than in the phrases expressing the high strung temperament of the singer she was portraying. Her "Vissi d'arte," though somewhat formal in presentation and detached from the running fabric of the drama, was sensitively phrased and colored and produced the greatest emotional impact of the evening. In the second act, in a gown of brown and gold brocade, Miss Tebaldi was a regal figure and, except for the very instant of the murder when Scarpia seemed simply to walk into the knife, she played the scene with a nervous agitation that was convincingly realistic. Elsewhere, however, she seemed less certain of the dramatic requirements of the role and employed distracting mannerisms of gesture.

Eyer, in sum could not help but admire Tebaldi's natural resources, but was not much impressed by the ends toward which she employed them.

The Saturday Review contained an even less generous appraisal.

Mitropoulos has directed some stirring Toscas since his first in 1955, but this was not one of them. He seemed to share the view of the audience that an opening night is an occasion for singers to renew acquaintance with their public, indulging Del Monaco and Tebaldi in whatever lengths they chose to prolong their ecstacies.

So began Irving Kolodin's commentary on the operatic events of the evening of October 27, 1958. The remainder of his review consisted mainly of increasingly venomous barbs aimed at the considerable short-
comings of each of the performing artists. Like Eyer, Kolodin gave Tebaldi full credit for sheer vocal beauty but indicated little regard for much else; and unlike Taubman his disapproval of the audience's questionable taste was unmistakable.

Miss Tebaldi received a tempestuous welcome at her entry and a tumult of "Bravos" for a "Vissi d'arte" that began slowly, arching to a leisurely climax in which power was more a factor than eloquence. In between there was a glow on the voice from the middle of the first act duet onward, a fullness and control that were good to hear, if not productive of the theatrical illusion that makes a Tosca convincing. The youth and good looks she brings to the part are all in her favour; the lack of subtlety or growth in dramatic detail not much in the listeners.

Kolodin's final evaluation of the performance carried with it the air of a heavy sigh. "There was, in sum, no single reason to term this a bad Tosca, but a variety of reasons why it wasn't a very good one."12

Winthrop Sargeant's critique of the showy but ultimately tedious Tosca is of exceptional interest. Because the performance itself offered little artistic interest, the New Yorker, critic used his review to examine one of the most fascinating aspects of commercial opera production as it has been generally practiced in recent years. The review is so informative and compact that it must be seen in its entirety to be properly appreciated. Sargeant dealt not only with the problems inherent in this gala Tosca performance, but with the problems of opera performance in general. He also revealed something of his own thought process as he sat through the performance:

Fine Points

One of the endlessly fascinating things about opera is the relation of a given singer to a given role, and the infinitely complicated and continually varying elements—voice, technique, appearance, dramatic ability, personality, and so on—that enter into this relation. Almost any operatic performance is likely to contain a few square pegs in round holes, some magnificently round pegs in round holes, and occasionally a
square peg of such outstanding character that it changes the shape of the hole it is places in, transforming a role to fit its own peculiarities and in the process, introducing a new and stimulating ingredient into the traditional conception of the part. All this happens, of course, because opera, more than any other branch of music, is a vehicle for personality, and because personality is a complex and largely indefinable and unpredictable phenomenon. The Metropolitan Opera opened the season last week, presenting its patrons with a repertoire that was entirely conventional—a Tosca, a Boris Godunov, a Rigoletto, a Tales of Hoffman, and a Madame Butterfly. Certainly there was nothing in this list of titles to raise one's blood pressure. Yet no sooner had the opening-night curtain gone up than one was involved again the age-old pleasure and excitement of appraisal. Which artists would perform well, and which badly, and why? Who would compare favourably with this or that great artist of the past? Would some well-known singer show a new development of his usual plateau, or slip slightly? Above all, to what extent would each singer succeed in vitalizing his role, and what would be the personal, technical, and artistic elements that led to his success or lack of it.

Tosca on opening night, offered an extremely interesting study in this respect. It was by no means the most brilliant performance of the opera that I have heard, but it had an all-star cast, including some of the most celebrated singers now before the public, and I found myself absorbed throughout the evening in analysing what they did, and in speculating on why they did it. The reason it was not a particularly brilliant Tosca appeared to lie in certain personal limitations evident in the work of Renata Tebaldi, who sang the title role; Mario Del Monaco, who sang Cavaradossi; and Dimitri Mitropoulos, who conducted the performance. Now, all these people are artists of a superior sort, who have from time to time brought me immense pleasure, and their performances last week undoubtedly qualified as big-league ones, such as are expected at the Metropolitan. Still, none of the three really reached that identification with Puccini's conception that is necessary to an ideal performance. Both Miss Tebaldi and Mr. Del Monaco have very large and very beautiful voices, excellent and dependable technique, and good looks. Both of them, however, have a somewhat limited emotional spectrum. Which is apt to fall short when they are called upon for tenderness, subtlety, or the finer shades of passion. In such passages Miss Tebaldi is apt to use fussy, self-conscious mannerisms, and Mr. Del Monaco is apt to stand and bellow with that magnificent, but rather insistent and monotonous masculinity that is his chief distinction as a singer. Mr. Mitropoulos has a similarly limited spectrum—devoid of tenderness and repose, and encompassing only the area of frenzied excitement. He is very good at whipping up frenzied excitement when it is required but there are a few moments of relative calm, and in these he appeared at a loss. One of the light hearted moments is the scene between the sacristan and the choir boys in the first act which should prepare one for the chilling entrance of
Scarpia—a contrast that ranks among the great dramatic instants of opera. The contrast was not there because Mr. Mitropoulos made his choirboy scene every bit as frenzied as what followed it, and in the moment of calm after Scarpia’s death, in the second act (a moment that should intensify the desperation of Tosca as she realizes that she is a murderess,) Mr. Mitropoulos seemed bent on pulling the score apart, as if it were an ecstatic sequence in a Hungarian rhapsody.

All in all, I am inclined to award my personal prize for the evening’s achievements to George London, an extremely intelligent and painstaking artist, whose portrayal of Scarpia, while not entirely smooth from a vocal standpoint, did succeed in the sort of projection of character and mood that seemed lacking elsewhere. Scarpia’s death, in Mr. London’s version, was, in fact, one of the few really gripping episodes in the production.

The title which Sargeant chose for his article suggests something of the care which he lavished on his topic. The article itself needs no further comment.

There are several points of comparison amongst the critical comments made about the October 1958 rendition of *Tosca* which should be reviewed before moving on to other performances. The four reviews discussed in this chapter are unusually similar in regard to specific points brought up for scrutiny and general conclusions reached. Even Taubman’s review, which was largely favourable in its evaluation hinted at the same flaws which the other reviews plainly asserted. Each review pointed out the following problems: Tebaldi tended to be overdone in her vocal characterization and underdone in her acting technique; Del Monaco bellowed too often and too insistently; and Mitropoulos’ exuberance overshadowed any of the subtler emotions. Eyer nearly paraphrased Sargeant in writing of Tebaldi’s "Distracting mannerisms of gesture," and like his colleagues, he frowned on the general din emerging from the pit and the stage. Only George London as Scarpia received praise, and the critic’s approbation like their disapproval was remarkable for its similarity of phrasing. All four critics provided descriptions of the opening night atmosphere.
realizing that the character and quality of the performance were much affected by the significance of the large event. As we have discovered thus far in this study, such a degree of unanimity amongst critics is rare and was probably evoked by the garish and overblown quality of the performance.

Later Tebaldi Toscas

Despite the less than overwhelming critical response to her Metropolitan homecoming in 1958, Tebaldi retained her position as a distinguished interpreter of Tosca for many years. The following excerpts from the Italian press reported in Theater Arts in 1960 represent typical examples of the admiration and affection accorded her throughout her career, particularly in the role of Floria Tosca:

Puccini celebration ends with a faithful and admirable interpretation by Renata Tebaldi... She confirmed her qualities of purity of style, a limpid and controlled voice, of incomparable vocal powers, and of the absolute equality of her vocal registers. A born interpreter of Puccini. (L'Unità)

A carpet of flowers for Tebaldi's return and wild applause for an evening of true bel canto. (Corriere Lombardo)

Fanatic reception at La Scala for Renata Tebaldi.... Her Tosca is truly a woman in love. (Il Giorno)

For Tosca at La Scala the public is in a state of delirium. The return of Tebaldi is the victory of an exile. What an event! (La Notte)

Triumph at La Scala.... The great art of Tebaldi in a superb performance of Tosca.... We have never heard Tosca sung so beautifully. (L'Italia)

Homecoming—Callas and Tosca in 1965

The evening of March 22, 1965 was the scene of another homecoming which marked one of the most celebrated operatic event of this century. Maria Callas returned to the Metropolitan stage after a seven year absence in the Franco Zeffirelli production of Tosca which had been mounted for her at Covent Garden the previous year. She had done very little
singing during her absence, and rumours about serious vocal problems hovered like moths around each of her rare, flickering but always incandescent performances. Callas' two appearances in New York culminated the series of Callas-Zeffirelli Toscas. The American press had first observed the London performances of the production in January 1964, then the Paris performances in early March 1965 with keen anticipatory interest. Peter Heyworth, correspondent for the New York Times, praised Callas' efforts almost without reservation. "Maria Callas' stage performances of late have been few and far between. But the widely mooted notion that this is due to vocal difficulties was effectively disproved this evening at Covent Garden where she made a triumphant return as Tosca." While Callas' singing was not flawless, Heyworth found it better than it had been.

This is not a role that can be carried by purely theatrical virtuosity. It needs singing and the soprano does just that. There was little trace of the broad throbbing vibrato, that pinched quality of voice and the shrill top notes that have disfigured so much of her recent singing. It is many years since her voice sounded in such good repair or so responsive to the heavy demands she makes of it.

The Times reviewer was even more impressed by her characterization of the heroine, although he never specifically referred to her "acting" as such.

But it is, of course, her extraordinary sensibility and almost creative sense of character that sets Miss Callas apart among present day singers. Her Tosca is far removed from the conventional grandiloquent prima donna. She is a nervous highly wrought creature in whose character jealousy and devotion, heroism and hatred play with the mercurial quality of a flame. Even the old war horse "Vissi d'arte" takes on a new meaning when it is sung as Miss Callas sings it, as an interlude of inward reflection and not as the usual sure-fire operatic aria. It is these gifts of imagination and insight that set her Tosca apart from all the others.  

Also writing from London Thomas Heintz for Saturday Review began his review with a brief sketch of the circumstances preceding opening night of the production.
The surprising fact is that for all the distasteful hulla-balloo, the desperate scramble for tickets, and the customary disreputable attempts by the yellow press to rekindle the hoary old "tigress" myth, the performances emerged as some of the greatest in the annals of Covent Garden. Framed by resplendent and gloriously solid sets that were beautifully lit and supported by fine orchestral playing under Carlo Felice Cillario's capable but somewhat self-effacing direction, two of the greatest singing actors of the post-war era brought new life to the most overly melodramatic of Puccini's masterpieces.

Despite his disapprobation of the pre-opening night pandemonium Heintz, like Heyworth, was full of praise for the performances and commented on Callas' ability to fulfill the highest expectation.

On the first night—before an unsuspecting audience—Callas had triumphed in spite of having to struggle with a throat infection and a temperature. By the time I saw her, six days later, she was in better voice than for some years past, singing with fresh confidence and producing sounds of ravishing individuality in the lower and middle ranges, only an occasional "curdled" top note reminding us of the flawed instrument with which nature saw fit to endow this supreme artist. Above all it was Callas' portrayal of Floria Tosca that held one spell bound.

Writing in similarly commendatory fashion, Mollie Panter-Downes in the New Yorker's regularly featured column, "Letter from London," described the excitement generated by the impending event, and, like her colleague Mr. Heintz went on to establish the remarkable degree to which Callas fulfilled expectations. The London correspondent deemed her "an artist who had [has] just proved here that no other living prima donna can hold a candle to her." In Panter-Downes' introduction and detailed analysis of the performance one is again struck by the instinct critics so often seem to have had to dwell on the minutiae of a Callas performance. The New Yorker critic pointed out that Callas managed to combine originality of theatrical detail with an impression of spontaneity. She thereby, managed to create the crucial "illusion of the first time" that is absolutely basic to the legitimate stage in every performance from a
pressure filled night to the closing night of a two year run, but seldom even mentioned in the operatic context. The high degree of stylization of the art form and the complexities of the international repertory system generally seem to be accepted, even in newly mounted productions as insurmountable barriers to freshness of approach of finesse in anything other than vocal detail; and Callas' achievement in verisimilitude was a rarity.

In Paris *Tosca* caused the same furour and received the same praise as in London. However, Callas' now fragile vocal capabilities, seemed inexorably to be waning. *The New York Times* Paris correspondent Jean-Pierre Lenoir called the Zeffirelli-Callas-Gobbi production "a full blooded, but tragic work" with the traditional trappings of melodrama pared away.

The high point of the opera is the second act tussle between Tosca and Scarpia. This scene in the hands of Miss Callas and Mr. Gobbi was woven into a consummate piece of artistry—a passage that would alone justify the London critics raves just last year about "A *Tosca* to end them all."

The whole performance was overshadowed by Miss Callas, who is in brilliant dramatic form. Vocally she seemed to be unsure of her upper register on several occasions and although her voice was rich and the coloring as bright as ever, it occasionally lacked sufficient power to make it audible against George Pretre's dynamic orchestration.

For the *New Yorker* Genet in her "Letter from Paris" described the uproar outside the ticket office of the Opera where frantic fans broke the "ticket" windows in their frenzy to obtain seats for the final performance. The review was reminiscent of the Panter-Downes report from London the previous year. It touched on several of the same points and came to several of the same conclusions, though with a few pertinent exceptions.

Her voice sounds healthier than it did a year ago in her *Norma* series, begging devoid of frightening outcries and
occasionally marked only by a vibrato, like worn velvet that has lost the evenness of its texture. Her tragic top notes, sung mi-voiz, as if to herself, are loudly covered by the orchestra, but the middle and lower registers are unique in their physical loveliness and in their ministrations to her genius for emotive acting—for magnificently incarnating the musical melodrama in which Sardou and Puccini perfectly met on the same desperate, passionate human level. In her duality as actress and singer, Callas has seemed doubly unrivaled. In the opening act, in the church, when, thin and agitated, she enters in full voice and in full love, one does not know which complete concentration of the senses to offer her—whether of the ears or the eyes—so prodigious is her performance. (Clarendon, Figaro's well seasoned music critic, opened his Callas review by saying, "I have the impression of having seen Tosca for the first time in my life.") In the fatal scene with Scarpia (handsomely sung by Tito Gobbi), she—or perhaps the stage director, Franco Zefferelli—has created a new long moment of dramatic tension. As she stands by Scarpia's supper table and sees a knife, there comes slowly into her face the look of decision. The knife is in her hand as the amorous tyrant impatiently throws himself upon her and upon its mortal thrust—far better melodrama than the customary womanly rush across the stage and the bare, uplifted soprano arm with its brandished weapon.19

Once again we have been presented with a sense of the carefully planned detail of Callas' interpretation. Genêt even implied that the wealth of detail was more than could be absorbed at one viewing of the performance. Once again we have been reminded of the feeling of immediacy that "the illusion of the first time" creates when it is present in a dramatic performance. However, Callas' voice seemed to have been working within a reduced compass of effective activity.

The New York performances followed close behind the Paris triumphs. Stirred up by advance publicity and the glowing reports from abroad, American opera fans had reached near delirium. Most reviews of the New York Tosca opened with descriptions of the highly charged atmosphere surrounding the first performance. Time Magazine reported the "agonies of anticipation" on the part of fans and tagged the audiences "the most glittering in memory."20 Newsweek declared the event "the most exciting operatic occasion America had known for years."21 Harold
Schonberg of the New York Times called it "Personal Triumph" and likened the street scene outside the opera house to "one of the circles of Dante's Inferno." Kolodin judged the opening performance as being not unlike that of the first game of the World Series in which the loudest applause is for the foul balls. Sargeant complained, "There was also an audience, containing a large number of notables of one sort or another, that applauded and shouted so loudly and continuously that it often interfered seriously with the progress of the opera."

As in London and Paris, the New York performances finally materialized, despite the incredible commotion and rumours of last minute retreat by the soprano. However, eight European performances and a trans-Atlantic flight had taken their toll. Callas' voice had tired considerably since the Paris premiere which had already elicited consternation about her vocal health from the critics. Nevertheless, her rendering of the famous fictional prima donna, inspired the New York critics to some of their most eloquent and most laudatory commentary. Time Magazine wrote, "Callas, singing the role of Tosca, made it so [a triumphant evening], not with her voice, but with every last ounce of her siren skill." About her acting of the role Time provided the following vivid description and high praise:

Tosca is a jealous lover, and Callas played the part with a pantherish intensity, purring innocently one moment, spitting hellfire the next. In the second-act encounter with lecherous police chief Scarpia, splendidly portrayed by baritone Tito Gobbi, Callas was at her supercharged best. When the soldiers carried off her Mario, they nearly buckled under her pummeling. She lurched desperately about the stage fending off Scarpia's advances, then in a violent flash drove a knife into his heart. Callas and Gobbi treated the Met to one of the best-acted performances it has seen in many a year.

Her singing, however, fared less well than it had in years.

But Tosca is not a play; the singing's the thing. And even
Callas could not make it otherwise. Never an instrument of luscious quality, her soprano last week was a thin and often wobbly echo of the voice that fled the Met in 1958. Her high notes were shrill and achingly insecure, and seemed all the more so by contrast with the rich, ringing tenor of Franco Corelli as Mario. In the poignant "Vissi d'arte" aria, Callas relied almost wholly on dramatic rather than vocal brilliance to carry her through—which, in her case is admittedly a compelling compromise. The audience certainly thought so. At the curtain, a shower of roses and confetti rained down from the galleries, and the house braved on for half an hour of curtain calls.

The Times reporter's final evaluation of the soprano echoed the audience's and having weighed his reservations he still declared her "indisputably the most exciting operatic presence of her generation."25

Obviously much moved by the event, the critic for Newsweek produced some of the most stirring and touching commentary regarding the fateful implications of the performance, namely, that it would be among her last.

The return of a champion stirs the hunger for something only a champion can provide. As Callas sung and moved on the great old stage one saw what only she could provide. On this night, at 41, after a flight from Paris and a quick reconciliation with the Met's Rudolf Bing, it was not everything she had provided in the past. But it was hers, only hers, and it was all the more touching for being incomplete.

The remainder of the Newsweek review elaborated the juxtaposition of human glory and human frailty, a comparison which seemed to strike a powerful chord in this journalist's heart and imagination.

Callas makes opera, that epic of necessary artifice, seem natural—an extension of human emotion into the extremes of exaltation and despair. She is opera's Duse, a great actress for whom the singing voice is simply the supreme gesture of a completely articulate organism. That voice, poignantly expressive in its inevitable decline, she used with great care and intelligence, wielding Puccini's long melodic line with head, arms, and body as well as larynx, turning song into the true speech of human idealism.

As Tosca, Callas was coquettish, imperious—as shallow and sagacious as a fiery, emotional woman must be. She was herself. With Corelli, she had all the silk and steel of a woman in love. With the great baritone Tito Gobbi as the predatory Scarpia, her voice and body were a
flutter of desperation in a giant golden cage. Her "Vissi d'arte" had the dark honeyed taste of the human will resigned to its fate. But there were two fates being drawn—Tosca's and Callas'. The careful champion was under severe pressure that increased with every cheer. Big, deep-chested Corelli, looking like Gentleman Jim Corbett in his tight trousers, was hurling vocal thunderbolts with casual strength. Gobbi, himself a masterful actor, prefected a ferocity of sinister power. In the long third-act duet with Corelli, Callas attacked a high note and it skittered like a bat flying out of DiMaggio's hands. The audience choked.

But Callas never faltered. She ended the opera like a flame, and took 30 minutes of curtain calls with a mellow, grateful smile, picking up a rose from the stage and pressing it into Corelli's hand. This was opera as it can be—a sacrament of art and personality.

It is interesting to note that the critic did not fault Callas' vocal deficiencies, but accepted them as natural and inevitable. In fact, he suggested that the soprano's flaws were intrinsic to the rare power and poignancy of her Tosca.

The New York Times presents us with a more conventional critical approach. Beginning his analysis with a description of Callas' acting technique Harold Schonberg then went on to discuss her singing.

Her conception of the role was electrical. Everything at her command was put into striking use. She was a woman in love, a tiger cat, a woman possessed by jealousy. In the second act she physically threw herself at the soldiers carding off the Mario. Her face mirrored every fleeting expression implicit in the music during her colloquy with Scarpia. This was supreme acting, unforgettable acting.

About her declining capacities as a singer he said,

But now we come to matters vocal, and the story is less pleasant. Miss Callas is operating these days with only the remnants of voice. Her top, always insecure, now is merely a desperate lunge at high notes. She sings almost without support, and her tones are shrill, squeezed and off center. It can be said that she avoided the sheer vocal desperation of her Covent Garden Tosca, singing with much more care. And in her biggest aria, with "Vissi d'arte," she sang in a subdued, almost reflective manner that made the most of the emotional content of the music, even if the purely technical vocal aspects sometimes went by the board.
In conclusion, Schonberg made the following succinct evaluation of the Callas characterization:

So there it is, and it depends on what your are looking for in a Tosca. If you want brains, an awesome stage projection, intensity and musicianship, Miss Callas can supply those commodities more than any soprano around. But if you look for voice and vocal splendor in your Tosca, Miss Callas is not the one to make you happy.

Although the order in which Schonberg stated the two alternatives may have indicated his personal preference for the latter, the majority of the audience presumably did not agree with him. The fans were nearly delirious in their eagerness to show their appreciation. When the final curtain fell, Schonberg reported that, "The excitement dwarfed anything that had gone before—and between the acts there had been plenty of excitement."27

Irving Kolodin was predictably enthusiastic about the Callas performance and had many words of praise for Gobbi's Scarpia as well. Only Franco Corelli fared badly earning the following impatient dismissal: "Given his physical advantages and the power of sound he commands, Corelli could make himself a painter-hero of the first rank, but this would take an alteration of attitude for which there is no reasonable hope." On the other hand, Kolodin tried his best to see Callas performance in the most favourable light excusing the "variable singing early in the evening as being the result of the carnival atmosphere of the occasion." Callas' triumphal moments were recounted in admiring detail.

Adroitly, expertly, skilled by long experience: together they played to each other's strength till it was no longer Callas and Gobbi but Tosca and Scarpia in their immemorial contest. Inevitably as the outcome had to be, when the curtain fell on her stumbling figure backing out the door from the room where Scarpia lay dead, everybody knew why Callas is Callas.

This was no sudden spurt to the finish line for a dramatic effect, but the inexorable period to a long, artfully constructed paragraph of characterization. It had
its beginnings in the hostility that bristled in her entrance, her suspicion of a "reason" (female) why Cavaradossi kept her waiting at the Chapel door. It turned as quickly to melting tenderness and as suddenly surged to irritation because he was preoccupied and inattentive. By the end of the act, when she was dabbling her eyes in vexation with his seeming deceit, the statement had been clearly made—Floria Tosca was a creature of moods and impulses, as unpredictably apt to chide one who blasphemed before the Madonna as to forgive her own offense, with a vengful core beneath the overlay of sanctity.

All this is in the text, of course, but not much of it is in the average Tosca, or even those above average ones who have more beauty of sound to dispose than Callas has, and thus an easier access to audience sensibilities. As she worked on, she left both average and above-average Toscas far behind, as one small detail and then another were woven into her texture of purpose. The best and most original came just where Sardou's play ordained, and Puccini's score confirmed that it should be.

How Tosca discovers the knife with which she destroys Scarpia is left, mostly, to the individual performer. Callas differed from all the others in the simplest way. She did not discover the knife. The knife discovered her. As she stood at the table, a wine glass at her lips to refresh herself after the tussle with the policeman-lecher, the metal was transformed to a glint in her eyes. A slight hesitation in putting the glass back on the table, a small inclination of the body (nothing gross enough to attract the attention unless one were watching her closely) gave a whisper of the plan forming itself in her mind. It remained but a plan until Scarpia approached; she lunged for the object on the table and in the same motion plunged it into his chest. It was the only way a moody, impulsive, unpredictable Tosca could have done what she had to do, when the vengeful core erupted through the sanctity that enclosed it. Thus was finalized the statement of character which Callas had begun some two hours before.

Kolodin was surprisingly harsh with regard to her vocal performance.

Of course, during all this time she was singing a good deal, with a vocal resource that seemed under better discipline though with substantially less expressive power than when she was last heard (also as Tosca) on this stage. What seems probable is that Miss Callas has composed her vocal problem by adopting a production that gives her, for this kind of role, access to all the notes she needs. But it is without question a hard sound, with fewer variations of color and inflection than she once possessed. When it came to straightforward singing, as in "Vissi d'arte", it was neither beautiful nor beguiling. Rather than being the high point of the effort, as it is for some, it was, with Callas, merely an incident (for all the applause it evoked...
in certain areas). But where others may falter, she excelled, which gave her effort its own inimitable stamp of dramatic authenticity.

The intelligence of Callas' performances had always impressed Kolodin, and that intelligence had never been more in evidence than in the 1965 Tosca. Kolodin speculated that the details of the performance had been calculated with the precision of a battle plan, and he implied that they were carried out with much the same spirit. By comparison to the sagacity and finesse of the Callas portrait Gobbi was mildly criticized. "He was not quite so resolute in his plan as Callas, deviating to a sortie of sound now and then, as at the end of Act I and the beginning of Act II, which confirmed rather than denied that his vocal reservoir is running drier all the time." Kolodin was not the only critic to appreciate Callas' powers of discrimination. A keen admiration of the soprano's intelligence was in evidence amongst all his colleagues during the entire Tosca series. In fact, it would seem in retrospect that as her vocal resources withered her other resources blossomed to compensate for the loss. It also seems likely that when Callas' vocal pyrotechnics lost their brilliancy, her other accomplishments shone more clearly. Kolodin closed his review with a comment which might easily have referred to the Renata Tebaldi Tosca of October 1958. "It was, unquestionably, a night to remember, especially on the next night when Tosca seems dull and lacklustre, due to no fault of Sardou, or Illica and Giacosa, who transformed his play into a libretto, or, least of all, Puccini."²³

Perhaps the least expected critical ardor was demonstrated by Winthrop Sargeant. Although he had over the years conscientiously documented his gradual metamorphosis from a neutral observer into an admirer of Maria Callas, he emerged at the eleventh hour of her career as an adamant devotee. Outdoing even her staunch supporter, Mr. Kolodin
Sargeant simply dismissed the vocal problems as "irrelevant." The title of the review was simply "Callas!" and having opened his commentary with a sketch of the pre-curtain events, he went on to praise in glowing terms the degree to which Callas lived up to the heady anticipation of her first entrance.

Miss Callas' reception was, I must say, every bit deserved. She was an electrifying on the stage—youthful, graceful, sensitive, beautiful to contemplate—and she lived the role as no other singer within my memory, except perhaps Mary Garden, has lived it. Miss Callas is a unique creature—already, in fact, a legend. Her voice, considered purely in terms of decibels, was not overwhelming the other night, and it was very artfully handled in order to curtail high notes that might have got out of hand had any forcing taken place. But that same voice, considered from the standpoint of expression and emotional shading, was marvellous to hear, recalling, from time to time, the voice of the great Claudia Muzio. I make these comparisons with Garden and Muzio simply to provide some frame of reference. Callas, perhaps the most individual operatic artist of our time, and a consideration of her voice as an athletic instrument is almost irrelevant, because it separates a mere facet from a total stage personality that can grip and hold an audience as few singers of today can. From her first entrance right on to her dive off the battlements of the Castel Sant'Angelo, she was a living, suffering, pulsating presence, giving herself in love, dissemblance, fury, and tragic resignation, and drawing her listeners into her emotions with a power that was almost hypnotic.

Sargeant's euphoria over the soprano's performance spilled over into his evaluation of the other performers as well. Gobbi was described as one of the great Scarpias, "poised, insinuating, occasionally savage, but, unlike most others, aristocratic and almost lighthearted in his sadism." Even Corelli whose "voice flowed forth like the phenomenon of nature that it is" came in for his share of praise. Sargeant called the performance "one of Mr. Corelli's best evenings, and though art seldom modified nature, the effect was still imposing."29

Perhaps Sargeant's characteristic rapture over Tosca was prompted by a premonition of doom. The New York production was to most intents
and purposes Callas' swan song. Her career had come to an end in overwhelming resurgence of admiration and acclaim. It is likely that every critic sensed the finality of the event for each rose to the historic occasion with eloquence and, one might almost claim, sheer kindness. Flawed though it was, the series of Zeffirelli Tosca may well have been Callas' finest achievement, not only because of the intensely human quality of the performance itself, but also because it inspired the critics to eloquent philosophic reflection on the nature of operatic performance and art and the entire spectrum of human endeavor. Each critic in his own fashion seemed to be echoing the thought which Newsweek quoted the diva herself as voicing, "Glory makes one afraid because one understands it isn't natural." The reviewer went on to add, "But humans cannot do without glory, which is why they cannot do without Callas."30

Conclusion

Notice should be taken at the conclusion of this chapter of the fact that opera reviews seldom dwell on the stage director's contribution to a production. Ordinarily this neglect is understandable because most operatic performances are so far removed from the newly mounted production as to bear little resemblance to the director's original concept. However, the critical neglect has been evident even in our study of Callas' last Tosca which had only recently been set on the stage by Franco Zeffirelli, a director of international reputation. The lack of attention to the directorial arts is a further manifestation of the secondary importance accorded the dramatic and theatrical aspects of operatic performance. It is also an indication of the emphasis placed in opera on the individual performer, including the conductor.
Returning to our examination of *Tosca* we find that though Renata Tebaldi's career was longer and she performed more often than Maria Callas, her enormous popularity never sparked the kind of emotionalism evoked by Callas' last *Toscas*. Callas often seemed a warrioress who battled self-made dragons; however, her courage was as great as her creative imagination. The element of desperation evident in Callas' work but foreign to Tebaldi's personality was doubtless a necessary ingredient for the impassioned accolades which were as much tributes to valour as to victory.

Although Callas' acting performances earned detailed criticism not accorded Tebaldi, the most consistent difference between criticisms of the two sopranos' performances of Tosca was in the area of vocal talent and skill. Paradoxically, whereas Callas was faulted, especially in later years, for not having sufficient voice left for the role, Tebaldi was periodically criticized throughout her career for having or, at least, giving too much scope to her abundant vocal resources.

Callas was a prodigious operatic actress, but to attribute her phenomenal success to her dramatic skill alone would be to oversimplify. She was an extraordinary performer who conceived her characterizations as summations of all her resources. The attention she lavished on every element of operatic performance added a dimension to the world's understanding of opera which is still evident today, twelve years after her stage career ended. It is quite possible that had Tebaldi's vocal excellence equaled Callas' histrionic excellence the world would have afforded her equal acclaim. However, it seems clear that it was not so much Callas, the actress, as Callas, the unique totality, who changed the face of twentieth century opera.


CHAPTER V-OTHER PERSPECTIVES

In attempting to analyze critical approaches to acting in opera we have been comparing reviews of New York operatic productions performed by Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi. Before concluding our study, we will examine other aspects of the two sopranos' work, such as recordings, concert performances and pedagogy.

Off the Record

An operatic performance is a complete and richly detailed experience; but an operatic performance which features the debut of an international celebrity is almost too much for even the experienced reviewer to assimilate fully, much less recreate in a few short columns of print minutes after the performance has ended. Previous chapters have demonstrated that after time for reflection critics often change their opinions of performers and performances. Recording reviews, on the other hand, are presumably written under less hurried circumstances and allow the critic unlimited opportunities to examine and re-examine a performance. Devoid of the trappings of the stage, a recorded performance presents the reviewer with a purely musical phenomenon to assess. Significantly, however, record reviews are often indistinguishable from stage performance reviews in their treatment of the dramatic expertise of singers.

Kolodin, Callas and Norma

Consider, for instance, the following review by Irving Kolodin of Maria Callas's first recording of Norma. The article was written after Kolodin had witnessed Callas' highly acclaimed Chicago performance of Norma. Although he was eventually to become an avid admirer of Callas,
his enthusiasm at this time was still muted.

It is Miss Callas' essential virtue to be a convincing Norma from the first to the last by drawing on those resources of dramatic projection and deeply emotional nature conveyed to us through her Elvira in I Puritani, Santuzza in Cavalleria and Lucia (if by no means her recent Violetta). Furthermore, all the voice she has to offer is not too much for this immense part, and it has the tragic accent which is wanted. Technically, it is decidedly erratic, not at the best in "Casta Diva" or "Mira, O Norma"....

Conceeding that two of the high points of the opera of dubious quality were nevertheless, reiterated Callas' strengths.

Against this, however, one has to measure Miss Callas' ability to form such a phrase as "Teneri, teneri" (where she is contemplating the murder of her children) with the powerful musical sense and a real emotional impact, or the blood-curdling "Quera", when she has decided to let her people have at the oppressive Romans, or the vengeful "Tutti! I Romani".

The simple fact is that instead of putting all her emotional eggs into the one basket of "Casta Diva" (with a few left over for the duet) Miss Callas rises to every expressive height, which is as much as one can ask in any interpreter of such a complex role. It is not the beautiful sound remembered from some performances of Milanov, or her records or Cigna's, Ponselle's or Musio's, but it IS Norma."

Kolodin freely mixed his comments regarding Callas' dramatic, musical and vocal accomplishments plainly viewing her expertise as a totality rather than a collection of less skills. It is equally significant to note that Kolodin based his conclusion that Callas WAS Norma on purely auditory data.

Callas, Tebaldi and La Gioconda

The following group of reviews is of a disparate nature; and although comparison of such a variety of performances and critics is difficult, certain pertinent conclusions are to be gained by the attempt.

Writing for Saturday Review Paul Hume in his 1953 review of the Callas Gioconda concentrated on describing the soprano's vocal equipment. Though not moved to write a finely detailed account of the dramatic
aspects of the performance, he was impressed by the sheer intensity of Callas' impersonation.

Her Gioconda is assured, passionate, a triumphant conception that starts at an incredibly high level and moves steadily upward from that point to a final act of blazing intensity. Callas has an even scale from a black-hued low chesty voice to an ecstatic high C and D flat of superb quality and perfect control. Her middle voice is of such velvet in forte and pianissimo as to startle you every time it is heard. And Callas has the innate intelligence to keep the voice alive to every inflection with the temperament of a Muzio.

No higher praise is possible from this poor typewriter than to have mentioned a contemporary soprano in the same paragraphs with Raisa and Muzio.2

Hume's mention of Claudia Muzio provided a valuable point of reference with regard to his standards of excellence. Her name appeared in an earlier review in which he assessed the merits of Tebaldi as Manon Lescaut. "...In vocal finesse Tebaldi is magnificent. She shades every word and note with that Muzio-like imagination that makes her so glorious these days."3 Favourable comparison with Muzio, the great dramatic soprano of an earlier decade, was tantamount to perfection as far as Hume was concerned; and it is noteworthy that both Callas and Tebaldi earned this compliment from him.

"Reanimated War Horse" was the title and theme of Robert Sabin's analysis of the early Callas Gioconda recording.

Thanks to the superb singing of Maria Callas, a generally excellent cast and a vigorous performance, this recording reanimates the faded measures of Ponchielli's La Gioconda. Even with out the sumptuous stage spectacle, upon which the music depends for much of its effect, the opera is generally vivid as it is performed here.

Miss Callas has the unusual vocal requirements for the title role. She has ringing top tones with great body and brilliance, and tones of equal beauty in the lower range. The voice for all its volume and power, is flexible and the scale is even. She is able to negotiate the wide leaps in the vocal part with complete security. Even when there is a trace of effort the voice never looses its vibrant richness.
Sabin pointed out a few specific examples in which various members of the cast excelled. However, on the whole the review reveals a focus of interest and a set of values similar to that of Mr. Hume. Although Sabin described in detail the unusual Callas vocal equipment, he contented himself with a generalized description of her suitability to the role. Sabin closed his review with strong words of praise for her singing: "La Gioconda is an old musical bag of bones, but it can be stirring when it is sung as it is in this outstanding recording."  

It should be remembered that these two reviews appeared at a time when Callas was a little known soprano to the American operatic public. The Gioconda recording was, in fact, one of the earliest opportunities for people on this side of the Atlantic to experience her art. It is remarkable so early in her career that Callas' performance was accorded more than a few lines of general description by the American press. While neither Hume nor Sabin hailed Callas as an emerging operatic goddess, something about her recorded performance caught and held their attention longer than their official obligations necessitated. Ordinarily, the quality of the voice itself would be the primary concern of a recording review. However, knowing of Callas' future reputation as an actress one wonders if it was not "the blazing intensity" of her acting rather than the "vibrant richness" of her voice which was the truly arresting fact of the recorded performance. It is a pertinent truism that people tend to see what they expect to find and that the new, the unusual or the unexpected is often overlooked. Callas' unique gifts may initially have been difficult for even the experienced critic to divine much less predict the significance of.
By contrast to Hume's and Sabin's reviews of early Callas, Robert Jacobson's review of Tebaldi's 1968 *Gioconda* is notable for its focus on the soprano's dramatic conviction.

As revealed in the new Metropolitan Opera production of *La Gioconda* last season, something in the Renata Tebaldi make up strikes a responsive chord to the Ponchielli-Boito blood and thunder concoction of all-powerful mother-love, jealousy, self-sacrifice and unrequited love. Despite a fleeting struggle and edginess with a few tones over an A, the soprano is at the height of her post-Adriana Lecouvreur vocal powers on London's new and vivid document of her newest--and perhaps most memorable--portrayal.

The crown of her commanding performance is as it should be in the fourth act—the dramatic and musical cream of the Victor Hugo-based melodrama. Beginning with the famous "Suicidio", she identifies totally with all the tortures, conflicts, and calamities that have befallen this poor street singer. By the time she begins to adorn herself for the treacherous Barnabe, she emerges a great committed tragic figure.  

Ponchielli's opera received from Jacobson much the same contempt that Mr. Sabin had accorded it fifteen years earlier, and Tebaldi, like Callas, was given credit for overcoming the triviality of the plot and breathing life into the tired heroine. However, considering Tebaldi's reputation as a bella voce singer, Mr. Jacobson spent remarkably little time discussing her vocal expertise. Perhaps he felt it unnecessary to linger over the soprano's predictable virtues in 1968 by which time her reputation had become familiar to the operatic public. The second paragraph of the Tebaldi review follows unmistakably the pattern of later Callas reviews which tried to convey the precise theatrical aptness of the renowned singing actress' performances.

It should be pointed out that Telbaldi had been known to have had a very close relationship with her own mother and had suffered a serious nervous and psychological collapse after her mother's death in 1957. The soprano may, thus, have had a special affinity for *Gioconda*. 
(though it is equally possible that the critics expected such rapport and saw in the performance that which they were predetermined would exist). It should be observed that like Irving Kolodin's *Norma* review, Jacobson's article could apply with minor changes to a staged production of the opera.

The contrast between the musically oriented early Callas reviews and the dramatically oriented late Tebaldi review suggests that possession of an exceptionally beautiful voice may curtail a singer's ability to give effective dramatic performances. Certainly, a singer who is totally concerned with producing endlessly beautiful tones greatly limits his or her dramatic range. Furthermore, a singer with a glorious voice need do little else than sing to satisfy the public. When the voice of an experienced artist begins to weaken, however, compensatory assets must be developed if an active career is to be maintained. Thus, both Callas' and Tebaldi's dramatic powers may have grown in direct proportion to their failing vocal abilities. It may also be true that a beautiful voice controlled by fine technique is so overwhelming a phenomenon that it may blind even the most professional observer to a performer's other excellences.

Callas and Tebaldi-One Critic's Retrospective Comparison

For a straightforward comparison of the recordings of Callas and Tebaldi let us look now at George Movshon's article in *High Fidelity* entitled "Callas and Tebaldi—Yesterday and Today" in which he compared two collections released in late 1969 of selections from the familiar and the lesser known repertories of each by that time legendary soprano. The review bore the subtitle, "Two new releases shed light upon the
careers of the divas who once monopolized an operatic era." Movshon opened his comparison with the following indication of his high esteem for both singers: "If recordings can be said to be reflections of a music age, then both these sets deserve to be encased in amber and kept in a time capsule. Song fanciers of later generations will then have some inkling of what was right, operatically, with our era, and what was wrong. Consider the polarities represented here." The review was comprehensive; however, Movshon introduced his detailed criticisms with a discussion which questioned the efficacy of comparing the singers at all.

How incredible that these two singers were ever rivals, that the partisans of one rose in the theater to hiss the other, that a feud was believed to rage between them! No two sopranos were ever more dissimilar, nor differed so drastically in style and temperament. Can you imagine cheering mink and booing sable, hailing gouda and scorning cheddar, clapping Laurel and hissing Hardy? Not only were they divergent in approach and manner, but they were in a real sense complementary to each other: each would have been less without the presence of the other in the same art and a age. The age—and let us hope it is not yet over—may go down in the performance history of Italian opera as the Callas/Tebaldi period,...How easy it is to fall into the same trap as the partisans...and start calling one artist 'better' than another without bothering to detail what they are better in or better at. And how irrelevant to the simple truth: the opera and the record catalogue need both the silk of Tebaldi at her best and the steel thrust of Callas at hers.

Movshon's effort to put the singers into perspective was laudable, but the conclusions he reached may not have accurately represented his true feelings. His choice of an utterly safe approach to a highly controversial issue and the remainder of the article, which is heavily weighted in Callas' favour, lead one to suspect the sincerity of Movshon's claim to neutrality. Tebaldi received warm, but restrained praise while Callas was accorded comments such as the following:
...Callas, whose anger as the betrayed Norma cannot be described in words, whose presence on any stage dominates the action totally, whose inventiveness, insight, and thrusts at truth are unique in opera [sic]. Even when her voice says no and refuses to follow her command, she makes her intentions plain. Listen to the appalling flubbed tenuto that ends the Cenerentola aria in this collection—as awful a bleat as you will find on a professional record—and see if you don't agree that what it is really saying is: There! That's all my voice will allow. But I am showing you what I intend: that's the important thing." And in the interview record she sums it up more tightly still: "Art," she says, "is more than beauty."

Callas fans will have most of this material already; and what is more they have acquired the knack of listening past (or through) the vocal wounds to the noble concept that often lies beyond. 6

Although the preceeding passages cannot be regarded as unqualified praise for Callas, they could be construed as an ingenious apology for her imperfect, if arresting talents. Whatever his true feelings regarding the two singers may have been, the main point which Movshon attempted to make, that comparison of such dissimilar artists is a meaningless endeavour, is valid and provides a reflective note on which to conclude our brief evaluation of recording reviews.

Telbaldi in Concert

Although less attenuated in theatricality than recordings, the concert platform also represents an incomplete form of operatic performance. Excerpts from opera often round out a recital program and complete operas, especially unusual ones, are occasionally performed without the paraphrenalia of the stage. Both Renata Tebaldi and Maria Callas appeared on the concert platform frequently throughout their careers and reviews of their performances provide further insight into their artistry.

Soon after Tebaldi had established herself as one of the finest
artists on the Metropolitan stage, she distinguished herself even further
in the recital hall. The soprano gave her first North American recital
in December 1955 in Carnegie Hall, and Irving Kolodin was on hand for
Saturday Review to review her non-operatic debut.

Ridiculous as it may sound, Renata Tebaldi—who has but
recently sung the best Tosca heard here in years—was
an even finer artist at her first recital in Carnegie
Hall last week that in most of her opera appearances.
That is to say, divested of the trappings of the opera
stage, and freed from the necessity of singing over an
orchestra, the purity of the voice, the simple sincer­
ity of her musicianship, and the outgoing warmth of
her personality made for an experience beyond any
expectations.

Tebaldi sang an all-Italian program, the content of which caused Kolodin
minor reservations. Otherwise, he was filled with admiration for her
great singing.

...Tebaldi commanded the attention with her fine phrasing,
the easy adaptability of the big voice to the
requirements of the more intimate material. As she
moved on..., the vocal colors glowed more and there
was a communication with the listener that marked her as
the rare kind of singer who can work the fine line as
well as the large.7

It is significant that Kolodin implied that "the trappings of the opera
stage" were obstacles to the artistry of Tebaldi, and that he regarded
the recital performance as superior to her best achievement at the
Metropolitan. Kolodin's comments were also entirely concerned with
her singing and with her non-operatic selections and made little
reference to her sense of drama or characterization.

Two months later the New York Times reviewed another Tebaldi
recital. In this instance, the reviewer felt compelled to comment not
only on the quality of her singing, but also on the relationship
between the emotional impact of her concert performance and that of
a fully staged operatic performance.

Her beautifully controlled, expressive singing of the "Ave Maria" from Otello was worth going to hear. The long line of the phrases was unbroken. Intonation was true and the quality of tone was charming.

In her performance with Mr. Bastianini, of the second act duet from La Traviata, Miss Tebaldi conveyed by vocal means alone some of the poignancy of the stage situation. It seems clear that Miss Tebaldi is something more than a vocal technician. She is also an artist who can convey emotion through song. The two qualities do not always go together.8

It should be pointed out that although the Times reviewer gave Tebaldi high praise, he credited her with captivating "by vocal means alone" only "some of the poignancy of the stage situation". Not that he had meant this as a disparaging comment. On the contrary, he obviously considered any evocation of the staged performance to be a major accomplishment under the circumstances. The Times' evaluation of the dramatic aspect of Tebaldi's concert performance stands in marked contrast to comments generally made regarding similar Callas performances and should be kept in mind for future comparison.

Making a further contribution to our understanding of Tebaldi, Robert Sabin included an excellent analysis of the factors that made Tebaldi the impressive popular as well as artistic success that she was in his review in Musical America of her Carnegie Hall recital in March 1957.

Singers when they are as radiant of heart and magnificent of voice as Renata Tebaldi, have the most potent spell of all over audiences and it was not surprising that the thousands who packed the hall and the stage at this recital gave this beloved artist a long ovation before she had uttered a sound. Miss Tebaldi beautifully gowned in white and positively throwing off sparks rewarded us with an evening of some of the most exciting vocalism imaginable. The sheer volume and intensity of her voice are almost overpowering in themselves, but quite as extraordinary is her ability to spin out tones and color and shape phrases in dramatic context.
Arias by Handel, Gallippi, and Scarlatti revealed the fine taste as well as the virtuosity of the artist. If she sang Mozart's "Ridente la calma" too operatically, she was again in the vein in an enchanting performance of "Un moto di gioia". Utterly delightful was Rossini's cycle "La Regata Venezian", in which Miss Tebaldi gave us a true portrait of the Anzoleta and her feelings. One envied her happy and triumphant Momolo, so captivating was the character.

A dream of limpid floating tone and far-flung line were her performances of Bellini's "Vaga luna che inargenti" and Davico's "O luna che fa lune", which she had to repeat. Among the encores were several arias, none of them more gorgiously sung than "Io son l'umile ancella", from Cilea's Adriana Lecouvreur.

Sabin's remarks concerning her individual selections were a compendium of excellences. It should be recalled at this point that Mr. Sabin's review of Maria Callas' Gioconda recording was notable for its preoccupation with the exclusively vocal virtues of the album. Faced with the actual presence of Renata Tebaldi on the concert stage Sabin showed somewhat more awareness and concern with the dramatic aspects of performance. He even identified personally with Anzoleta's lover Momolo in response to Tebaldi's interpretation of a character which was not even from the opera repertoire.

Viewing Tebaldi outside the complex, cluttered context of the opera stage, the critique by Sabin managed to capture vividly the nature of her popularity. To put it in the simplest terms, the famous soprano was a nice person with talent. But her "niceness" had an expansive, emphatic quality that communicated itself directly to her audience, and her talent, of course, was enormous. In fact, everything about Tebaldi was larger than life in an uncannily literal and unaffected fashion. It did not matter from the point of view of simple emotional communication whether or not she did a convincing impersonation of a character because she was herself, without any selfconsciousness,
a great and endearing character. Any spectator or auditor was, therefore treated to a moving human experience while absorbing her art, even when that experience may not have been precisely what the librettist had had in mind. Perhaps the clear, simple focus of the concert platform allowed for a more appropriate evaluation of Tebaldi's particular genius; but only the grandeur of the opera house could provide a large enough frame for the magnitude of her human and artistic presence.

Callas in Concert

Maria Callas also gave many concert performances especially between the years 1957 and 1959 when her warring status with so many major opera companies kept her off the operatic stage. Callas in December of 1957 provided Newsweek with the opportunity to describe a scene, in which the elegant soprano made shrewd use of a few simple, but striking theatrical effects and, otherwise, concentrated on singing superbly. Newsweek reported the following excerpt from John Rosenfield of the Dallas Morning News, who the national magazine dubbed "the most influential critic in the Southwest":

The soprano may not be a vocal paragon...but she is a svelte ensemble of voice, good musicianship, and interpretive conviction who registers a dramatic and emotional point with the slug of an unerring sledge hammer....What she does to an old showpiece by Bellini and Donizetti...makes a living art out of a dead esthetic language.10

In addition to Rosenfield's praise Callas received enthusiastic commendation from Domethea Bourne writing for Theater Arts.

To heighten the soprano's own personal magnetism and a golden gown that was worthy of Dietrich, Manhattan's famed lighting expert Jean Rosenthal set Callas like a Tanagra figurine in a huge shadow box. Her magic worked on even the tone deaf. But for those with ears as well as eyes, it was an even greater night. Having carefully, but none too artfully, negotiated
her way through the tortuous tessitura of "Martern aller Arten" from Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Callas moved serenely into her natural realm with Bellini, Verdi and Donizetti. In the opening phrases of "Qui la voce" from *I Puritani*, she showed herself still to be queen of Bellini singers, and with "Lady Macbeth's Letter Scene (Verdi), and above all the final scene and aria from Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, Callas proved to everyone's awed delight that when she is rested, able and willing to sing, she is in veritas Empress and Defender of the Faith of Italian opera's world-wide dominions. Throughout her eight taxing arias including Violetta's "Sempre libera" (Verdi's *La Traviata*) there was some shrillness evident in the top of Callas' range; but her evocation of those old-fashioned heroines made them immediately recognizable to Texans as sympathetic and thrillingly star-crossed women.11

In January 1959 Callas again triumphed on the concert stage, this time in Paris. Everett Helm reporting for *Saturday Review* briefly praised the general excellence of her singing, then proceeded to elaborate on the formula for success with which she caused, "Pandemonium to break [broke] loose."

Step by step, Mme. Callas had completely conquered her audience, the Rossini piece ("Una voce poco fa", *Barber of Seville*) was indeed perfection itself. But it was not her singing that had captivated the Parisians—it was equally the fascination of her personality and her ability as an actress. Without benefit of costumes or scenery she established, by discreet gestures and miming, the dramatic atmosphere of each aria in a way that was of artificially theatrical but distinctly "grand".12

The preceding three reviews demonstrate that Callas knew the value of theatrical effect even when performing on other than the operatic stage. It is equally apparent that the soprano was able to achieve characterization of remarkable completeness without the benefit of plot, sets, costumes or stage movement.

**Il Pirata** in Concert

Unexpectedly, one of Maria Callas' most successful New York
performances was a concert rendition of Bellini's *Il Pirata* at Carnegie Hall in 1959. Typically, the performance was navigated cautiously over an undercurrent of strong emotionalism because it was the soprano's first New York appearance since the outbreak of her well-publicized feud with the Metropolitan's general manager, Rudolf Bing. *Newsweek* reported the event in an article entitled "The Time Was 10:05", observing that the early part of the evening proceeded calmly and decorously until Imogene's "Mad Scene".

...Callas, who had stormed her way into-and-out-of-most of the world's major opera houses, was determined to make Carnegie Hall count. It did.

At 10:05, almost two hours after the performance had begun, the singing actress came to life. As the moment arrived for her big solo Mad Scene, the traditional half-light of the concert hall was lowered and the theatrical magic of a blacked-out opera house took over. When a single spot light flickered fitfully and picked out her reed-like figure, she began to sing. Once again by voice and gesture, she transformed herself into a wraithlike creature from another world, an enchantress who could, and did, drive most of her audience into a howling half-hour ovation.13

Next morning in the *New York Times* Howard Taubman reflected on the event. He described in detail the technical effects which went into making the most of Callas' spectacular solo turn.

For the concluding number, one of those mad scenes in which Italian composers of the nineteenth century liked to have their prima donnas expire, the lights were doused. Only the lamps on the instrumentalists desks remained on and a spotlight played on Miss Callas. This wasn't the Met, but it was the atmosphere of the opera house.

Miss Callas rose to the occasion here. One no longer kept an eye on her Empire style white satin gown with its embroidery of beads and sequins nor on the long red stole that she handled throughout the performance with the skill of one who knows how to make an effect. Her companions in the cast had slipped off the stage, as they had finished their chores. Now she stood alone in one spot, a slim, intent figure emanating the magic of the theater.
Newsweek had informed us that until the moment of the "Mad Scene" the formal conventions of concert performance were strictly observed, but Callas, the show woman, knew well how and when to manipulate circumstances to best serve herself and her art. She took a calculated risk in departing from the traditional concert format. However, she carried out her unorthodox artistic scheme with such dramatic and musical effectiveness that she won over even her most conservative critics.

She sang the introductory recitative and then the aria, "Col sorriso d'innocenza", with commanding artistic resource. She had been in good voice all evening though her attack at the outset, probably because of tenseness, had the impact of a buzz saw.

She had sung with a grasp of the Bellini style and with enormous conviction. At times the voice had been ingratiating; at others it had had an edge. Top notes had been a gamble—either shrill or brilliantly in focus. But now at the end she did not fail. This was Miss Callas living up to her reputation.14

A caustic barb aimed at Rudolf Bing opened Irving Kolodin's lengthy review of the *Il Pirata* performance.

Thanks to Rudolf Bing, New York music lovers have a clearer idea of the sumptuous talents of Lorenzo Bellini, and particularly of his *Il Pirata*, than they have had in decades, or perhaps ever. This was not due to his initiative as producer, but to his banishment of Maria Callas from the Metropolitan, which enabled the American Opera Society to organize a performance around her in Carnegie Hall.

Before launching into a detailed account of the Callas Imogene, Kolodin briefly described the circumstances which led up to the unusual concert event, and discussed the particulars of the staging, the triviality of the plot and the extreme difficulty of the vocal music. "And, of course, that brings us to the crux of the matter," wrote Kolodin, "for without a genius of Miss Callas's special endowments and acquired
resources, *Il Pirata* would founder on Imogene's first entrance." He continued his praise in the following manner:

Her voice was hardly loose, at this point, but it was all fervor and solidity. Much could be made of the extremes of range with which she coped impressively well, but there was much more art and expression in her finely controlled delivery of the legato line and its embellishments, in her sense of the tragic accent appropriate to the words and their meanings, and the kind of spell she casts with a covered sound as against an open one.

Throughout Act II and coming to a proper climax in the final "Mad Scene" (which she sang alone on a darkened stage in a spotlight) Miss Callas disposed vocal powers not previously heard at her command in New York. The pleading "Tu m'apresti in cor ferita" (with her husband, Ernesto) was an example of warmly colored cantabile singing (in Mozartian vein), which attested her ability to make an emotional appeal without bravura or other exhibitionistic devices. To labour the superb delivery of the "Mad Scene" is hardly necessary. For visual effect, Miss Callas deployed a wide stole of floor-length silk (a deep raspberry red in color) which served as scarf, drape, or cape to accent position and posture.

Although Kolodin's description and analysis of Callas' performance was primarily in vocal and musical rather than theatrical terms, he wrote in his introductory remarks of "the desirable interaction of theater"; and he was impressed by the handling of the red silk stole, her only stage "prop".

Probably the most important aspect of his *Il Pirata* review was that Kolodin availed himself of an opportunity to defend his own critical stance in regard to Miss Callas. His praise of her was aggressive and almost arrogant. It is probable that Kolodin felt emboldened to defend his personal convictions about Callas' abilities in the wake of *Il Pirata's* unqualified musical and vocal success, a rarity in the soprano's increasingly erratic record.

For those who contend that a critical "double standard" is indulged by some who overlook blemishes in the art of Callas while rigorously demanding
perfection of others, it should be noted that her short­
comings are measured in terms of the unconventional and
the inaccessible, those of others in terms of the conven­
tional and the easily accessible. To achieve perfection
in a part of this kind, a singer would have to be born
with exceptional talents, reared in a school long since
forgotten, and devote herself exclusively to such music.
Miss Callas has the talent, but she has had to improvise
the school, and of course has dabbled with a vast variety
of other things from time to time. Sometimes what she pre­
sents of a bygone era is seen dimly as through a glass, but
it is to her enduring credit that she has enlarged prevail­
ing ideas of what the female voice can do, and has bared the
aspects of character, emotional projection and dramatic
credibility long overshadowed by the blinding light of
mere vocalism.  

Kolodin seemed to be saying that Callas' true genius lay in her will and
her ability to sing life and depth into characters which had become
trapped between the two dimensions of cardboard theatricality. He did
not, however, ever refer specifically to her "acting" accomplishments
as distinct from her skill as a singer.

Turning to the New Yorker we find that the criticism from Winthrop
Sargeant one of his most interesting studies of Callas. So commenda­
able an example of Sargeant's urbane and scrupulously conscientious
style is the review, that it deserves to be reprinted in full.
However, in the interest of economy of space and time only excerpts will
be considered in our study. "The art of Maria Meneghini Callas is, by the
standards of today, a unique and unclassifiable vocal phenomenon."
With this forthright statement of the problem at hand Sargeant opened
his review. He then set forth his personal criteria for early nineteenth
century bravura singing.

This ideal, which I have seldom heard approached, is made
up of many distinct elements, some of them relating to
purely physical athletics, others to dramatic qualities
of personality, and still others to stylistic taste and
what is ordinarily referred to as musical intelligence.
Miss Callas has an extraordinary number of these ideal
elements.

He enlarged upon Callas' virtues in detail, then stated what he counted as her flaws.

Where she falls short of the ideal is in certain lack of serenity (she seems involved in a fiercely competitive battle the moment she steps onto the stage) and in a lack of the sensuous purity of tone that one ordinarily expects --and often gets--from sopranos of far less arresting gifts. Yet, after listening to her repeatedly, I am becoming accustomed to these flaws.

The last statement is of particular interest because it suggests a distinct middle period in the progression of Sargeant's critical appraisal of Callas. Though he had not yet become an enthusiast, the New Yorker critic frankly acknowledged the change in his attitude since his initial reaction to Callas' first Metropolitan season. He elaborated further his new opinion.

Purity of tone and ease of voice production are, after all, rather commonplace things, which can be found, coupled with greater or lesser artistry, all the way from the singing of Victoria de los Angeles (which comes to mind as a particularly lovely operatic example) down to the singing of Perry Como, at the other end of the artistic spectrum. And just as a practiced gourmet may prefer the bitter olives of Miss Callas' ancestral Greece to a chocolate milk shake, one can get used to, and even prize, the peculiar feline, and sometimes down-right abrasive, quality of her voice. The voice, reedy as it is, has a character all its own, and is certainly one of the most expressive instruments of its sort that I have ever come across.

Sargeant went on to discuss what he termed Callas' "irrepressible theatrical instinct", describing the visual details we have previously seen outlined. He concluded his review with the following statements which include a bemused speculation on Callas' effect on other critics:

She sang with all the qualities I have previously noted, and with an intensity of feeling that was bound to disarm all but the severest of her critics, building toward the evening's climax with an assurance that was not
displeasing, even if it was somewhat aggressive. Now and then, there was a wobbly high note, or one that resembled a shout, but such things seem to be part of Miss Callas' total personality, and I reflected again that the virtues of the total far outweigh an occasional flaw. Sargeant's article needs little discussion. It is an example of the exemplary journalistic criticism which we have previously found to be characteristic of the New Yorker critic. The review made the circumstances of the performance and the attitude of the reviewer perfectly apparent. It discussed the singer, the opera and the performance in some depth. Most importantly, it managed to maintain an air of objective tranquility about an artist who was, as Sargeant himself pointed out, particularly notable for her contagious "lack of serenity". Unlike the Newsweek reviewer, Taubman or Kolodin, however, he did not alude to Miss Callas' acting abilities, nor did he speculate on the implications of the palpably dramatic impact of her performance, removed as it was from the full regalia of the theatre.

It is interesting to observe that while Kolodin and Sargeant arrive at almost identical conclusions about the Il Pirata performance, Kolodin gave impression of being "involved in a fiercely competitive battle" while formulating his final judgement. His aggressive stance rendered his review a forceful, yet somehow less convincing statement than Sargeant's unruffled discussion of the event.

Callas' Success as a Concert Artist

Somewhat surprisingly, in view of her reputation as an effective actress the concert format proved complimentary to Maria Callas. Perhaps the simplicity of the staging allowed her a certain beneficial relaxation of concentration on the multiple facets of her art. Whatever
the reason, in the critics' eyes Callas performed well both vocally and dramatically in each of the concert appearances recounted in this chapter. If anything, her histrionic talents seem to have been displayed even more effectively in this relatively non-theatrical genre of performance. Her acting seems to have been perceived by most critics as a more isolated ingredient of performance than many of her opera reviews imply. Perhaps these seemingly paradoxical observations made by the critics may be explained by the fact that the structure of a recital performance being sectional and incomplete encourages the spectator to see the facets of a performer's art more precisely and clearly. For instance, an aria becomes a "number" that must be performed and viewed for its own sake. The singer is obliged to create a mood and a character immediately without benefit of explanatory plot line, sets or costumes. The performer cannot slacken his or her concentration on either the singing or acting and expect that the dramatic momentum will carry him over the operatic peaks or precipices. Consequently, concert singing must be of consistently high quality and attempts at characterization must be both potent and concise. Furthermore, the audience is less likely to be distracted from accurate observation and, thus, judgement by the trappings of the theatre. This theory is not meant, of course, to suggest that recitals and concerts are more artistically meritorious than opera; they are only simpler, more focused and, in some ways, more intense phenomena.

We have seen so far in this chapter that analysis of the effective balance of singing and acting in opera remains complex even when scope for the theatrical elements of performance is curtailed. The critics dealt with show remarkably little distinction in attitude or terminology when evaluating full scale operatic performance or when
analyzing a recital or a recording. If anything, some aspects of acting in opera are enlarged upon more fully and clearly than they have been in opera reviews that have been surveyed in previous chapters. We shall now move away from the realm of performance altogether in order to gain a more direct perspective on what Renata Tebaldi and Maria Callas were attempting to convey through their art.

**Callas Master Classes**

One of the major events in the operatic season of 1971-72 took place, not on the professional performance stage, but in the lecture hall. Maria Callas made a public reappearance after seven years of silence as the teacher of a series of master classes at the Julliard School of Music in New York City. The audience was heavily sprinkled with celebrities of the operatic world and newspaper men who gave the event the same attention accorded a Callas performance at the height of her career. The master series provides our study with an opportunity to compare what the performer avowed to be attempting with what the critic perceived her as accomplishing through her art.

*Time Magazine* featured an article which described several examples of her teaching techniques, all of which tackled, predictably enough, the dramatic aspects of singing. The journalist summed up with a quotation from an interview with Callas herself about her new profession.

'I try to impart to the students things that came to me naturally, and that may not be natural to others. To be an opera singer you have to be an actor or an actress. You have to look well on stage and off. There is no excuse for being 30 lbs. overweight. And you must have nerve. I tell my students to think. Before they sing a phrase they must have the expression--the thought behind the music--on their faces, so the public will see it first. I tell them to put more poetry into their voices, I try to teach them humbleness toward music.'
The reviewer added, "The kind of humbleness, in other words that they can be proud of."¹⁷ This article had opened with a salute to Maria Callas as one of the great singer-actresses of the twentieth century; and it seems apparent by her own comments that whatever confusion she may have stirred in the minds of the American critics, Callas herself had a clear sense of herself as an actress.

Writing for *High Fidelity*, Conrad L. Osborne revealed less about Callas' artistic priorities. His lengthy analysis of the Callas master classes was largely made up of complaints about the dubious virtues of public master classes in general and about the questionable quality of singing amongst young American students. However, Osborne praised the instructress without reservation, referring to her very presence as a "health-giving Latin breeze [which] blew through the Julliard theater, bearing a message not of slovenly musicianship or provincial vulgarity (the underside of Italian influence, and far from Callas' realm), but of full-throated tone, freely shown emotion, and bounding theatrical rhythm."

Of her value as a teacher he gave the following praise:

As a teacher, Callas is as she was as a performer; dead serious, the complete professional. There was no hint of the ego trip, no Advice from On High baloney, not a trace of negativism. There was not a single instance of sarcasm, undercutting, or easy setting-up at the expense of the student. She was not playing or consciously performing; she was working, and her sense of dedication to and love of, everything involved in being a singer was inspiring. She approached the situation without constraints or artificialities; she was present not as a personality but as a person, a woman, magnetic and authoritative, but entirely without affectation or assumed aura.

This series of classes showed beyond any question that Maria Callas has something real to offer as a master coach. Genius can't be transferred, of course, and no amount of coaching will substitute for the sort of musical and dramatic instinct with which Callas can still illuminate—no bass has ever made of the recitative to "Il lacerato spirito" quite what soprano Callas showed is in it, and this is but one of many possible examples. But much of her perception of the emotional import of color, of the urgency of the rhythm, of the importance of
trained selectivity and taste, can indeed make a difference to students of musical talent and laryngeal health.

In closing, Osborne reiterated some of his criticisms of the class format and of the choice of students, and he offered suggestions for improving the sessions. He concluded with a barb aimed at the professional opera world. "Better yet, Miss Callas might wander a block downtown and work with such Metropolitan and New York City Oper principals as may be smart enough to swallow some ego." 18

Using a formula of journalism similar to Osborne's, Francis Rizzo, a New York stage director who was a frequent contributor to Opera News, produced a three page article about the Callas classes which reviewed the sessions in detail recounting everything from the many distinguished audience members to the "scarely contained motions of her [Callas'] head and hands" as she listens to a student singing Gilda from Verdi's Rigoletto. In his "Post-postscript" he offered the following summation of Callas' pedagogical endeavours and of Callas herself:

"This is just one of the tricks of the trade, 'Callas' cool disavowal of Oracular gifts seems apt enough when you consider the points she has raised from class to class. "I make no claim to any innovation; my way of work has been practiced intermittently throughout opera history." She has been sharing secrets--her own, and those she learned from others--piecemeal, at random, as the occasion warrants. Often they are in themselves unremarkable, even banal. These do's and don'ts include: lean on the consonants; remember, the end of a phrase is as important as the attack, and vibrancy must be maintained from start to finish; drama comes from calm and depth, not from pushing; carrying focused tone; give each note its absolute value; portamento is one thing, scooping quite another; be mindful of your colleagues and adjust yourself according to their strengths and weaknesses; in preparing for performance, work, work, work--then let yourself go. Hardly the stuff of revelation, but it is the ensemble of all these "little tricks," her heroic resolve toward perfection. That goal, she knows, cannot be reached: "and thank God, too--think how boring it would be!" But if she, through sheer strength of concentration, can forge these "tricks"
into a single intity we know as Callas, can other follow her example? She will make a point, then: "Got it? Ehhh?"
The student nods, but still one wonders. Yes, he's got that clearn, but for how long? And what about the rest of what she's said? For to her students, as to her public, Callas offers nothing more or less than...herself. She is the Callas Method, and these extraordinary sessions at Julliard are less a master class than some kind of pendant to her career as performer—they are an extension of the process of self-explication she pursued onstage for over three decades. After seven years of public silence, she has thrown open the doors of her studio to show that now, as then, she is far from ideal. "What do you do if you do not work?" She asked some years ago. "I work, therefore I am."
In this Cartesian context, it scarcely matters if her students profit from such privileged encounters; she does, we do...If nothing else, her classes form a wealth of footnotes to our understanding of the most acute and protean operatic sensibility of our time.

There are two points of particular interest in the preceding three reviews. The first is the notable similarity between the principles of excellence which Callas attempted to convey to her students and the examples of excellence which critics of the past had attributed to her own performances, Callas, in other words, could hardly claim to have been misunderstood as an artist. She stressed musical accuracy and finesse, on the one hand, never letting incorrect pitches go by without comment and remaining unmoved by ringing high notes sung at the expense of the greater part of the score. On the onther hand, she scorned the tentative approach ("you are still too cautious on the high note. Whatever you have, out! Eh?"); and though she advocated tireless work she depreciated the notion of perfection reached. "To be an opera singer you must be an actor or actress," she said, yet her instruction always advanced through the singing to the character. In one of her few comments specific to acting she made this remark which is a primary rule amongst many "straight" acting teachers. "Don't move your hands so much. A movement must have meaning; otherwise, please just stand still. You can stand still and you can act, as long as the stillness has an intensity, an aliveness."
Callas was a dedicated follower of her own precepts; and critics, on the whole, recognized the value of her striving toward perfection, though they were often constrained to recognize her failures to achieve it.

The second point to be noted with regard to the master class reviews is the reverence with which Callas was treated after her seven year retirement. There was hardly a hint of negative criticism amongst the three articles we have surveyed. Even the exacting Mr. Osborne, who found much at fault with everything else about the classes, seemed to take the instructor's worth for granted. There is no trace of the old debate about whether she was awesome or awful. Her unique genius was regarded as a self-evident truth and unquestionable worthy of being passed down to posterity through the Julliard classes.

It is interesting to consider that only two years later when Callas made a performance comeback in a concert tour with tenor Giuseppe Di Stefano, controversy amongst critics erupted once again. True, the vocal problems which marred her celebrated last performances as Tosca were more than ever in evidence; but her efforts to overcome them the memory of which critics had during her nine silent years come to praise as intelligent and courageous provided in live performance a paradoxical challenge for her audience. It seemed that Maria Callas was mistress of enigmatic and uncomfortable artistry which could be admired unquestionably in repose, but which challenged and perplexed in action.

Maria Callas as Director

In 1973 Callas turned her hand to directing. This new facet of her operatic endeavour might have provided further illumination into her artistic ideals had the Turin production of Verdi's I Vespri Siciliani been more successful or had she continued with her directorial efforts.
As it happened the production was uninspiring hampered by lackluster conducting and an undistinguished cast. Directing opera is, at best an exacting artistic endeavour in its own right and perhaps with experience Miss Callas will become a stage director capable of investing in her cast some of the excitement she once brought to the operatic stage. The operatic world would then gain yet another perspective on the Callas art.

Personal Interviews

The most direct formoof information about Callas and Tebaldi are personal interviews, although everything the singers say about themselves need not be accepted at face value. During the turbulent height of her career Callas' interviews mainly consisted of defense of her controversial conduct both on and off the stage ("I am not guilty of all those Callas Scandals," Life, 195921) or elaborate apologies for her vocal problems ("My lonely world--A woman looking for her voice," Life, 196422). However, seven years of retirement seemed to produce a more reflective mood in the soprano and in several interviews including a recorded one which companioned her album "La Divina," she made many revelatory comments regarding her artistic values. On the subject of music and bel canto she said,

Opera is music. Music means solfeggio, one, and harmony, two. (I was very bad at harmony!) And you have to sing the bel canto method--any music, even Mahler. But bel canto is not just beautiful singing. It is a matter of expressing music in words. One can't sing beautifully a phrase which is terribly dramatic. You can't use a delicious sound for a strong emotion.23

On the subject of drama Callas offered the following thoughts:

In opera, drama comes first, ahead of music. If you're angry, there can be no voice that is both beautiful and efficient. When you're angry you shriek. Otherwise it's
boring. Otherwise its just oratorio. Of course, it's ridiculous in opera to have to sing, "I love you." Then was I overcome this is to believe it when I sing. Then I persuade you. Callas' comments concurred exactly with the impression she had made on the critics at the apex of her career.24

In 1971 Tebaldi granted a rare interview to Opera News, entitled significantly enough, "Good Vocal Habits." In it she discussed two of her favorite roles Aida and Violetta, about which she spoke in affectionate terms, but without the passionate intensity and sense of identification which Callas always suggested when discussing her favorite heroines. Tebaldi also disclosed her approach to staging.

Whenever and whatever I sing, I try to make each new performance a dramatic creation in its own right. I avoid repeating the same gestures, the same motions, at every given moment. For one thing, such a routined procedure tends to make for a routine performance. In second place, one must always allow for changes (even emergencies) in the playing of the rest of the cast. If one is utterly habituated in addressing the tenor from the left, let us say, and suddenly he happens to turn right, one could easily get confused. It is good to avoid feeling dependent on any element but one's own thoughtful and concentrated working out of every stage situation as it occurs. Also, each singer should play to and with his colleagues. It is not enough to face one's partner, look at him, sing to him at the moment that the score demands it, and then look away again and arrange one's costume. At every moment of playing, one should be completely in character, looking, talking, conducting oneself exactly as the personage would do.

Though Tebaldi's comments reveal her conscientious nature, they do not suggest the intellectual force of a thorough artistic philosophy. The soprano was also quoted as affirming, "The inherent charm of good singing is beautiful quality. This what the singer works to build and to maintain. Never should quality be sacrificed to range, to power, to anything at all." Tebaldi's attitude toward singing stood in diametric opposition to the performance doctrine embraced by Callas.

The only unexpected facet of the Tebaldi interview was her advice concerning career strategy.
When it comes to actual stage work, I feel that it is wise not to begin with secondary roles, hoping thus to get at chance to grow into leading roles. This idea may be sound enough, but it is difficult to make it work! Too often the singer who begins with small roles stays with them for years; and once one has become typed as a secondary singer, it takes even harder work and greater determination to go higher.²⁵

Tebaldi's attitude in this interview suggests that the ostensibly, shy, retiring singer was a shrewder and more calculating woman than was generally thought.

Before moving on to conclude our study of the importance of acting in opera, it seems appropriate to quote Maria Callas on the subject of "Critics." In an interview for High Fidelity she said, "...I would like one thing, and I've always said it. Critics should be permitted to watch all our rehearsals because then they would understand what our work is like. One cannot judge from one performance which may not be the best performance." She then added reflectively, "It is very difficult to sing."²⁶

Conclusion

It has been stated repeatedly in this study that the relationship between singing and acting in opera is a complex and controversial issue. In examining closely these two aspects of operatic performance our analysis cannot claim to have solved the riddle of how singing and acting most effectively interact. The debate is probably irreconcilable, and its complexity is doubtlessly an indication of the richness of the operatic experience. The artistry of Maria Callas and of Renata Tebaldi met with equal success in the opera world, though the sopranos represented polarities in the controversy of "acting" vs. "singing" in opera. If Callas' career seemed more spectacular at times, it may as well have been the result of her flamboyant personality as her histrionic pyrotechnics.
Certainly none of the many well-respected critics treated in these five chapters could be accused of ignorance about the complexities of operatic performance. In fact, the critics' very awareness of these complexities caused their conclusions regarding Callas and Tebaldi as performers to be varied and wide ranging. B. H. Haggin clearly, preferred beautiful singing to dramatic verisimilitude. However, he was quick to attack Tebaldi when her lack of stage awareness rendered her mannerisms ridiculous to his eyes, thus distracting him from the music. His retrospective summation of Callas on the other hand, was laudatory. Her vocal inconsistencies and occasional histrionic excesses faded in his memory, while her fine musicianship and strong characterizations remained vivid. In contrast to Haggin, Irving Kolodin valued drama over ear ravishing sound. Nevertheless, though he idolized her, he was not blind to Callas' limitations nor was he unmoved by Tebaldi's flawless vocalizing. Perhaps the only criticism that can be fairly leveled at the critics in general is that though they usually made their conclusions clear enough, they often neglected to lead their readers through the process by which they reached these conclusions. Winthrop Sargeant may be commended in this regard for unfailingly providing his readers with guide posts by which to follow his path of thought. His urbane and easy wit, in addition to his admirable conscientiousness which rendered his reviews models of accurate and lucid journalism, managed always to impart an air of rationality and calm to his writing. Such dispassionate objectivity was often lacking in many of his hotly argumentative and sometimes defensive colleagues.

At this point, questions implied in Chapter I need to be answered. What is the purpose of a critic and have the journalists treated in
this study fulfilled their purpose despite their idiosyncrasies? Reducing the answer to its lowest common denominator, perhaps it can be said that a critic is a distiller of data. The greater his knowledge on his subject, the more competence he displays in analysis, the higher his moral sense with regard to his critical obligations, the "purer" or closer to truth will be his conclusions. These conclusions may then indicate to the reader who has not been present at the performance being reviewed where he can best spend his time and his money. For the reader who has shared the experience, the critics' opinions may clarify on the performance either by stating it more succinctly or by giving the reader something specific to react against. Occasionally, a reviewer may even change the reader's mind.

The one available piece of data we have concerning reader reaction to critical reviews is in the form of a page of letters to the editor which were prompted by Herbert Weinstock's article "Maria, Renata, Zinka... and Leonora." Eight letters were printed and we must presume that they are a representative sampling. Three letters agreed wholeheartedly with Weinstock's evaluation of the three sopranos. ("I'm a poor one to be critical—but when I see in print my very own ideas expressed so faithfully as you—with fairness to all three ladies—I do want to say Thank you to You!") Four letters disagreed with varying degrees of virulence. (We have already dealt with the opinion of Donald McDonald of the Catholic Messenger who faulted Weinstock's partisanship for Callas as "out of place" in such a distinguished publication as Saturday Review.) One letter proferred the suggestion that Callas may have been closer in style and character to Jeritza than to Garden or Chaliapin as Weinstock had suggested in his article.27 Significantly, not a single correspondent admitted to have undergone a change of heart due to Mr Weinstock's
analytical efforts. Only one correspondent treated the article as a
discussion rather than as an argument. This small sampling of reader
reaction seems to indicate that for most people a critic functions merely
as a sounding board for their opinions rather than as a pedagogue. How­
ever, the conclusion that a critic has no effect on his public is contrary
to the theory set forth in Chapter I that critics hold undue sway over
their reader's opinions. Perhaps this discrepancy can be explained by
postulating that, rather than being representative of the readership at
large, those people who bother writing letters to the editor are, in
fact, persons of unusually strong conviction. The silent majority of
readers may well be more tractable. In dealing with that part of the
public which is intellectually and emotionally involved in the subject
under review, most critics are perhaps less persuasive than they
might be.

As has been previously mentioned, most critics tended to dwell mainly
on their conclusions giving only cursory attention to the process by which
they reached them. Therefore, the reader had little choice but to
agree or disagree. To regard the critic's ability to sway a reader's
judgement as indicative of his success is a debatable and perhaps morally
dangerous stance. However, Winthrop Sargeant would seem to have been
the most persuasive opera critic we have dealt with. In carefully
describing the critical process, Sargeant allowed his reader opportun­
ities to agree or differ at several points before he himself pronounced
final judgement. The reader, therefore, need not in the first place
have felt constrained to whole-heartedly accept the critic's conclusion;
and, in second place, because Sargeant did not aggressively threaten the
reader's ego with self-righteous declarations of truth, the reader might
even have been more receptive to making small concessions.
Now perhaps is the moment at which to re-examine two statements quoted in Chapter I from "Critics and Criticism in the Mass Media" which pertain to critical function. The article said, "All publishers ...select critics who more-or-less mirror their audience's biases."
The first sentence of this quotation suggests a publishing policy which is perhaps practical to an extent, but which could easily create a comfortable, stagnant milieu for critic and reader. Any educational function a critic may be expected to perform would be greatly reduced under such complacency. Unfortunately, as is suggested in the article as a whole, preservation of the status quo is the aim of the great majority of American journalists. However, as the first sentence of the quotation summarizes the norm, the second sentence prescribes the ideal of critical practice. There have been numerous examples in this study of reviewers resisting the majority. Very often they have pitted themselves against the applause of idolatrous, but indiscriminate audiences. Sometimes they have set themselves against the consensus of other critics. On rare occasions, a critic has even cut across his own grain and radically changed his estimation of a singer. Thus, despite the generally complacent atmosphere of the world of journalism the critics whom we have been examining have been men of exceptional integrity measured by the standard advocated in "Critics and Criticism in the Mass Media."

Let us turn from the arbiters of the issue of acting in opera back to the issue itself. In the course of this study the problem has been examined from many sides. We have looked at what both the singers and the critics have said concerning the issue. We have also looked at what they have implied through their performances and in their reviews. The question, "What is acting?", must finally be asked.
Although volumes have been written in answer to this very question, perhaps the simplest answer is that acting is the creation of convincing characters. There are two steps inherent in this process. The first is one of interpretation, that is deciding exactly who and what the character is. The second step is persuading the audience that the interpreter is the character. Maria Callas was complete master of the first part of the acting process. She had a vivid and precise concept of each of her roles, and she executed her interpretations through a myriad of carefully conceived musical and theatrical details. There were times when she could not summon sufficient inner conviction to fulfill the second part of the process. When she did achieve it, however, the effect was superb.

Renata Tebaldi by contrast, was not noted for the insight or intellect of her interpretations. Nevertheless, she did manage to achieve a remarkable degree of credibility in her portrayals simply because her own personality, on the one hand, so artless and engaging, had a potency, on the other hand, which projected strongly across the footlights. Tebaldi was, in other words, a species of operatic character in herself, as such was capable of giving her audience a warm, emotional experience even when her interpretation was not meticulously accurate.

Before concluding the discussion of acting in opera, it should be recalled that even on the legitimate stage character portrayal is accomplished largely through vocal skill. In classical Greek tragedy where masks and highly stylized movement are often used, one might rightfully claim that reliance on purely vocal accomplishments is even greater than in opera. The story and the characters in opera are created primarily by the music, and it is the correct interpretation and performance of the music which brings the drama to life. A singer may sing
beautifully, but give an ineffective interpretation of a character.

On the other hand, the success of an operatic performance is often marred not because a singer's inability to move well on stage may be regarded as a serious lapse in character interpretation, but because her awkwardness actually detracts from the beauty of her singing. It is too common a pleasantrty to suggest that opera is best enjoyed with ones eyes shut.

Callas, was unique in that she was able to commandeer all of her resources equally to the task of interpreting a role, and the result was a series of characterizations of unusual credibility. In opera, therefore, although we cannot expect equal accomplishment vocally and histrionically, the greatest performers in this medium do not fail to satisfy on both scores. Moreover, our research has proven that while opera critics, on the whole, demand much musical and little dramatic finesse in operatic performance, they are capable of profound appreciation of a singer's histrionic talent and will, with few exceptions, overlook many vocal flaws when compensatory abilities are manifest.

The recipe for operatic perfection changes with every opera, every singer, every performance; and, whatever the individual convictions of artists, critics of spectators, the secret of operatic success remains a paradox, as well it should. All great works of art are cherished as much for their aspects of seamless beauty. It is in that sometimes infinitesimal space between imperfection and perfection that the poignancy of human existence lies. Perfection, to use Maria Callas' own description, would be so "boring."


25 Ibid.


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Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians
Completely revised by Nicolas Slominsky

Maria Callas (real name: Kalogeropoulos)
Soprano of Greek descent; b. N.Y., Dec. 3, 1923.
At the age of 13 she went to Greece and studied at the Athens
Conservatory; returned to New York in 1945. Made her professional
debut at Verona in Gioconda (Aug. 3, 1947);
on April 21, 1949, she married Giovanni Battista Meneghini, an
Italian industrialist. She continued to sing in Italy, appearing
in Wagnerian roles, as well as in the lyrical repertory. She later
appeared in London and Paris. She sang Norma at her American debut,
which took place in Chicago (Nov. 1, 1954). She made a spectacular
first appearance with the Metropolitan Opera in that role on Oct. 29,
1956, attended by an enormous flow of publicity and genuine enthu­
siasm, particularly of her dramatic ability. See R. Neville,
"Voice of an Angel" in Life (Oct. 31, 1955) 36 Ave, George Mandel,
Paris, France, 3.

Olin Downes, 31n
Eminent American music critic, b. Evanston, Ill., Jan. 27, 1886,
d. New York, Aug. 22, 1955. He began study of music at an early
age, later student of Dr. L. Ketterborn (piano, music history, and
analysis), Carl Boerman (piano), Homer Norris and Clifford Heilman
(harmony), and J. P. Marshall (harmony, music appreciation).
1906-24 music critic of the Boston Post; in 1924 appointed music
lector at Boston University under the auspices of Massachusetts
Extension and Lowell Institute, and at the Brooklyn Academy of Arts
and Sciences (32-34). Awarded Order of the Commander of the
White Rose, Finland (37); hon. Mus. Doc. Cincinnati Conservatory of
music (39); Books: The Lure of Music (1918); Symphonic Broadcasts
(31); Symphonic Masterpieces (35). He edited Selected Songs of
Russian Composers ('22), contributed articles to Music Quarterly,
Music Review, and to many other music magazines, compiled and anno­
tated Ten Operatic Masterpieces, from Mozart to Prokofiev ('52).
A selection from his writings was published in 1957 under the title
Olin Downes on Music, edited by his widow Irene Downes.

Robert Evett
American composer, b. Louland, Colorado, Nov. 30, 1922. He studied
with Roy Harris in Colorado Springs, settled in Washington as a
writer and composer. Works: cello concerto ('54), variations for
clarinet and orchestra ('55), piano concerto ('57), Symphony No. 1
('60), concerto for harpsichord ('55), viola sonata ('58), piano
quartet ('61), sonata for oboe and harpsichord ('65), Symphony No. 2
"Billy Ascends" for voices and orchestra to the text by Melville
(Washington, May 7, 1965), "The Windhover", a concerto for bassoon
and orchestra (5th Inter-American Music Festival), Washington, D.C.,
May 20, 1971), songs, piano pieces.
Everett Helm
American composer and musicologist, b. Minneapolis, July 17, 1913. In 1935 he graduated from Harvard, received the John Knowles Paine travelling fellowship and studied in Europe with Malpiero and Vaughn Williams; head of the music department at Western College, Ohio (1943-44), toured South America ('44-46), theater and music officer under Military Government in Germany ('48-50). Works: concerto for string orchestra ('50), piano concerto (New York, April 24, 1954), Adam and Eve adaptation of the 12th century mystery play (Weisbaden, Oct. 28, 1951, composer conducting), concerto for 5 instruments, percussion and string orchestra (Bonn, Oct. 10, 1953), The Siege of Tottenburg, opera in three acts commissioned by the Sueddeutscher Rundfunk ('56) "500 Dragon-Thalers," a Singspiel ('56), second piano concerto (Louisville, Feb. 25, 1956), Woodwind quartet, string quartet, two piano sonatas, songs and choral pieces. He also edited the chansons (Northampton, Mass., 1942) and madrigals of Arcadelt.

Paul Hume
American music critic, b. Chicago, Ill., Dec. 13, 1915. Studied at the University of Chicago; took private lessons in piano, organ and voice; was organist, choirmaster, and a baritone soloist at various churches in Chicago and Washington; gave song recitals in Boston and in the Middle West; taught voice at Catholic University, Washington; in 1956, became music editor and critic of the Washington Post; instructor in music history at Saturday Review (New York); active as lecturer and radio commentator on music; published Catholic Church Music (New York, 1956) and Our Music, Our Schools, and Our Culture (National Catholic Education Association, 1957). Paul Hume leaped to national fame in 1950 when President Truman, outraged by Hume's unenthusiastic review of Margaret Truman's song recital, wrote him a personal letter threatening him with bodily injury. Hume sold the letter to a Connecticut industrialist for an undisclosed sum of money.

Harold Rosenthal
English music editor and critic, b. London, Sept. 30, 1917. He received his B. A. degree from The University of London in 1940, served in the British Army during World War II, in 1950 launched, with the Earl of Harewood, the magazine Opera and became its editor in 1953, also issued Opera Annuals ('54-60). He was archivist of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden ('50-56), contributed to many European and American music journals. His publications include: Sopranos of Today (London, 1956), Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden (London, 1956), A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera (with John Warrack, London, 1964). He also edited the Mapleson Memoires (London, 1965). In 1964 he undertook a lecture tour of the U. S.

Robert Sabin
Winthrop Sargeant
Studied composition (not violin) with Albert Elkus in San Francisco and with Karl Prohaska in Vienna. His violin teachers were Arthur Argiewicz in San Francisco and Lucien Capet in Paris. He published a personal memoir *In Spite of Myself* (New York, 1970) in which he recounts with astonishing candor a series of his sexual and musical frustrations.

Harold C. Schonberg
American Music Critic, b. New York, Nov. 29, 1915. He studied at Brooklyn College (AB 1937) and New York University (AM 1938). From 1942 to 1946 he was in the army; then was on the staff of the New York Sun ('46-50). In 1950 appointed to the music staff of the New York Times; also has contributed to various musical magazines. He published "Chamber and Solo Instrumental Music" in the series *The Guide to Long-Playing Records* (New York, 1955), *The Great Pianists* (New York, 1963), *Lives of the Great Composers* (New York, 1970). In 1971 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished criticism.

Victor Seroff

Howard Taubman

Renata Tebaldi
Italian soprano; b. Langhirano, Parma, Feb. 1, 1922. She received her elementary musical education at home from father (a cellist) and her mother (a singer). She studied with Passani in Parma; then took a thorough course in vocal training with Carmen Melis (1939-42). She made her operatic debut as Desdemona in Trieste (1946); sang the same role at Covent Garden, London (1950), and at the Metropolitan Opera, N. Y. (Jan. 31, 1955); also appeared in S. A. (1952). Her repertory includes Aida, Mme. Butterfly, Tosca, Marguerite, Violetta, etc.
Lester Trimble
American composer, b. Bangor, Wis., Aug. 29, 1923. He studied composition with Nikolai Lopatnikoff at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburg and later took private lessons in Paris with Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger; subsequently was appointed to the faculty of the University of Maryland. Works: two string quartets (1950-55), symphony (1951) sextet for woodwinds, horn and piano (’52) violin concerto (’55), "Closing Piece for Orchestra" (’57) Five Episodes for orchestra (’64), "In Praise of Diplomacy and Common Sense" for baritone, percussion, male speaking chorus and two speaking soloists, "Solo for a Virtuoso" for solo violin (’71) songs.

Herbert Weinstock
American writer on music, b. Milwaukee, Wis., Nov. 16, 1905. Educated in his native town, later took courses at the University of Chicago. He published the following books: Tchaikovsky (1943, also published in French, Portuguese, Spanish, and German), Handel (’46, also in German), Chopin, The Man and His Music (1949, also in German), Music as an Art (’53), co-author with Wallace Brockway of Men of Music (’39), revised and enlarged 1950) and The Opera: A History of Its Creation and Performance (’41). Weinstock is an executive editor for Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York publishers: Donizetti, and the World of Opera Italy, Paris and Vienna in the First Half of the 19th Century (New York, 1963), Rossini (New York, 1968) Vincenzo Bellini: His Life and Operas (New York, 1971).

Who’s Who in Music, 1972

Roland Gellat
The Fabulous Phonograph: from Edison to Stereo, New York, Appleton-Century, 1965

Thomas Heintz

Peter Heyworth

Robert Jacobson

Newell Jenkins
Irving Kolodin

William Fense Weaver